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NOTE: Titles of rank in the post-Polynesian communities, will be mongrel elaborations of the ancient Polynesian 'tuan'—'lord' or 'sir'. Though far from military, and applied indifferently to both sexes, they might conveniently be compared with military grades of the Atlantean epoch, as follows:

Tu & tua	*n c o*
tuan	*lieutenant*
tuanta	*captain*
tuantath	*major*
tuantatha	*colonel*
tuantoi-tan	*general*

As in the military equivalent, the sub-grades of tuantoi-tan will not be expressed in conversation.

'Tuantoi' included all ranks—'gentlemen'.

The capitalized term 'Tuantoi-tan' might be compared to 'general staff'.

Where rank is unknown or questioned, the indefinite form 'tuanto' will be used.

The generic, or family name following the title will be used only in formal or official address.

The title itself, however will always be used except between intimates. Its omission, therefore, can be highly significant.

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PART 1

BIRTH OF A DRAGONFLY

For, a society is not an end in itself, but a means to other ends. Like the individual organism, the organized society can be a bad thing or a good thing: It is bad if it has achieved security simply to consume and to repeat fossilized, backward-looking patterns of behavior; for then it does not even enjoy itself. It is good if, and only if, its pleasures are part of an expanding communion with its universe; enjoyment must be both present and prophetic. Such, at least, would be my evaluation.

J. H. MONTGOMERY: *The Biology of Society*

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CHAPTER 1

TOMFOOL RIDES OUT

Pahad tuan Konor, in the rear of the Convocation Hall, kept relaxing from an angry crouch on the edge of the divan-bench, to a studied back-leaning and arm-folding. Now he jerked to the edge of the seat again, his throat taut and dry, a swordsman ready to parry and lunge, as the Envoy of the Tuantoi-tan, the Continental Council, paced to the front of the platform. *This* was *it*!

The Councillor was a wizened man, smaller than any of the University Council ranged behind him in a rainbow of academic sarongs. But the utter self-assurance of an authority never questioned, much less challenged, cowed the hall. Between him and Pahad, the ranked heads submitted to a spokesman for the multi-billion Rightness of the Community.

But Pahad knew that rebellion smoldered in most of them. In Pahad himself, it didn't smolder; it licked up in sullen flames. Blight the Community! Blight the sacred billions of Freemen! Blight the besotted Council! They pinned him helpless, insect under bulldozer, while they smashed all he had won in spite of them. But at least, he could still hate.

The Councillor spoke with dry brevity, an official snub: "As I understand it, tuantoi, you make three pleas against rationalization of this university. First, that you have contributed many

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times more to the World Crop than could be gained by practical use of your grounds. This we admit."

("Which," Pahad taunted back silently, "costs you nothing.")

"However, you can hardly expect *any* contribution to buy you *perpetual* immunity. Second, you claim that rationalization would feed barely your own personnel. Now, tuantoi, why should you *not* feed your own personnel? Your failure to do so may affect the Baby-ration by only four or five in each City of ten million; but every Freeman Couple feels that *it* is the one being deprived of higher rewards. Your notorious parasitism embarrasses the whole Hierarchy."

On either side of the platform, heroic, lifelike carvings depicted the Universal Freeman Couple, beautiful, uplifted, Eternally Real, reminding every Hierarch of his dedication to creating more of them.

Pahad jeered mentally at the Councillor's knock-down argument: "My heart bleeds for the Hierarchy. Can't it take a stand once in ten generations?"

The Councillor proceeded suavely: "Finally, you point out that when the Universities at Waikiki and Ulm were rationalized, they ceased to produce, and disbanded. Now, I've just viewed your grounds, and they're very quaint. But are these curious, obsolete trees *really* so much more conducive to Creative Thought than our universal, handsome, nut-bearing types? Are these useless lawns so *much* more stimulating than the Decorative Crops that brighten the residential areas of fifty billion fellow men?"

Laughter from the minority Rationalization Party.

"The Old Universities were decrepit relics in our great Community, and succumbed to the mild adjustment of rationalization. If you dread the transition, tuantoi, you admit you are equally senile. In any case, if the experiment doesn't work, we can always revoke it."

("If we can't *keep* our sanctuary," Pahad raged, "what hope would we have of getting anything *back*? About as much as you'd have of undigesting a meal. Stick trees up again, once they're down? Revoke a Baby-ration once it's bestowed? Hah!")

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"You're being very temperamental. However, as a fellow-Hierarch, I'll offer you a bargain if you're really so distressed."

("Nothing that will cost you two grains of wheat, I'll wager.")

"Your great argument is your productivity. But this argument is lamentably wilted by the blunt fact that you have produced *nothing* material in the past thirty years, not since Vekuhwi's accelerated process for decomposing fish-bones. Well, then: *If* you can offer me reasonable prospect of something that will satisfy the Community, I will offer you a respite of five years to finish it. And if it develops . . ."

The flames of Pahad's anger leaped from kindling to heart-wood. *That* alms was more paltry than even he had expected, the old, old ultimatum of purse-holder to creator: turn out a pink miracle-pill by deadline! For the past millennium, so exhausted were possibilities and so scanty resources, that any fruitful project required not a lifetime but a dynasty to develop. And the chance that any such project was now ripening, had probably been discounted in advance by sly inquiry. The face-saver was so flimsy a mask as to be hardly worth donning.

"Can any of you offer me such a project?"

A long pause, helplessness on one side, smug relish on the other. The sly inquiries had been thorough and accurate.

Pahad's wrath culminated in an explosion that surprised even himself, that blew aside all prudence, if he had ever had any, all calculation of impossible odds, and hove him to his feet: "I can, tuantoi-tan."

Faces turned towards him, bewildered, dumbfounded, even scandalized.

The Councillor was imperturbable: "I do not believe I know you, tuanto?"

"I am Pahad tuan Konor, a geophysicist of this University."

"And in what way can *geophysics* benefit the World Community in the next five years, *tuan*?" He emphasized ironically the barren specialty and modest rank.

"I am completing the labors of an honorable sequence of workers on continental shifts related to crop-zoning, tuantoi-tan."

"You're very young to be completing such an impressive

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project, *tuan*. And does the shift *really* affect zoning?" The voice dripped honey of sarcasm.

"I believe I can prove that, over the past millennium, we have lost up to one percent of possible crops, due to delayed adjustments, tuantoi-tan."

The assembly gasped and shuffled. That flat statistic was sensational.

"One percent! Really? If you can justify one tenth of that, tuan, it will be a *most* remarkable contribution." The Councillor shrugged cynically. "Have your material ready. Bring it to your Chancellor's office when I send for you."

No other voice was raised, and the convocation broke up.

Pahad left the hall, hollowly aware that he had staked a promising future on a hundred-to-one gamble. His colleagues knew it too: A few friends congratulated him dubiously; known enemies gave him sleek, sideways glances. Up front, the Universal Freeman Couple in their shrines, maintained attitudes prettily symbolic of productivity—agricultural, industrial, or obstetrical; he caught a whiff of the immemorial peppermint incense.

But at the exit, he received his justification. There it was! The Old University. The one thing on Earth able to stir him to the ultimate delight that justifies life—home, beauty, the only square mile left on Earth where he could be happy. Had he been allotted any scholar's cell, in any Science Center, outside the Bliss of Freeman life, he would have accepted gratefully enough. But blind Fortune had set him *here*!

The crowd scattered past and left him with—Her. He had never lost the sweet bewilderment of first love for this place that he could not have imagined till it burst on him. The word 'love' he rejected disdainfully; 'love' was a narcotic he had escaped with agonies to win this serenity. Yet he thought of the University always as She. She was a wild, vague thought as you strolled through shuffling Autumn leaves; She was fellowship and flame-light when the soft, southern Winter granted a frosty evening; and now, She was late April afternoon, Her trees romping and the grass rippling like fur of some delicate, emerald

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beast of Hers. With Her, he was safe and hidden from Them—the tormentors of his childhood.

And now They were coming with Their cant of Duty and Reality, of forsaking the Dead Past and striding on into the Mighty Future—the past that held life, and the future that was timeless idiocy. They were coming to attack Her, the last citadel of live delight.

Fight, then! He bounded down the steps and loped along familiar paths towards his quarters. The first clash in this battle would be won by having his records ready and plausible to gag any bumbling by the Councillor. The wind ruffled his sandy hair like indulgent fingers; and at the angle of the Hall, he broke from the path and ran, like any school-boy, across the truant grass, under the useless, gallant trees.

Maybe the cursed crop-trees and ground-cover *were* as beautiful as this in the abstract. But in plain fact, they were symbols of the engulfing cult that pressure-molded all men into anonymous units, over all Earth. This *was* the last citadel, the last defiance. Fight for it, then!

He reached his dwelling breathless, with glowing cheeks. For all his thirty-odd years, he felt infinitely young and sanguine.

A hektad later, with Summer full-blown, he was still sanguine as he reported to the University Chancellor's office, in answer to a summons.

A brief wait in the ante-room was warmed by recalling his triumph over the Council Envoy, just in there. His materials had been undeniably promising; no-one but himself could tell that five years was desperately scant time for rounding them up. Still, in ancient eras, men had worked six, eight, even ten hours a day. So . . . why not he?

His name was called and he strode blithely into the inner sanctum.

The Chancellor was a square-hewn, lugubrious man. As expected, he wanted a progress-report. As also expected, he received its optimism pessimistically. At last he cleared his throat: "Tuan, this is an unusual responsibility you have taken on yourself."

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"If I hadn't taken it, who would have?" Pahad retorted hardily.

"Tuan, the rest of us were not so naive. We *knew*."

"Knew what, tuantatha?"

The Chancellor sighed deeply: "That we were given *no* choice, only a polite ultimatum. We sympathize with you; we admire your courage. We too regret the passing of our home. But . . . you are very naive."

"But we *were* given a choice," Pahad insisted, "And I took it. I'm in sight of making good on it, too. Especially if I could get some help."

The Chancellor looked uncomfortable: "Young man, do you fancy you will be *permitted* to carry out this work of yours—in time at any rate? To aid your folly would be *most* injudicious."

"What can stop me?"

The old man pursed his mouth: "Obligatory Service for one thing, tuan."

Pahad stared. It was true, of course; he owed a year's work to be done on anything the Tuantoi-tan prescribed. But he rebounded stubbornly: "That's only a year, tuantatha. I can *still* do it. Give me a few subalterns to do the mechanical work, that's all."

The Chancellor shrugged: "Do you fancy that this is more than the first step? They have inexhaustible resources, and they can use up your five years, easily. Here, this is for you." He thrust a record-wafer across his desk.

Pahad took it, unable to foresee that this tiny loose end would unravel his universe. The delicate spikes of recorded speech were quite legible to a literate eye in that fluid language: ". . . to report to Goahu tuantatha Neihu, Director of Research, at the Control Center, on the fourth day of the forty-second pentad . . ." Why, that was today! "Very good, tuantatha; the sooner the better!" But his defiance rang thin in his own ears.

Outside the Chancellor's office, he paused a moment to rally himself. His rebound was characteristic: turning on his heel, he set off for the South Hangar at a quick-step. Ten minutes later,

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he was air-borne, skimming towards the notch on the southern horizon that was Control Tower of Science Center III.

Behind him, the grounds of the Old University contracted, first to a cluster of gray buildings with scarlet touches, in Polynesian Gothic, then to a patch of rebellious color against the endless nut-forest of the watershed. In barbarian times, he reflected bitterly, a relic like that would have been treasured, nursed and multiplied; men would have made pilgrimage there to bathe their minds in their past. In *this* age, it was another barleycorn to be sucked down the maw of a gigantic, mindless life. Its trees would be distilled into another drop of fuel in the world-ration, its buildings replaced by Normal Units, its unique personnel dispersed and assimilated. Not a seed would remain of the last elms, birches, and pines—or of the last individuals—on Earth. *She* would be gone with all man's past.

Not that the 'individuals' had dared help him to fight for her, or given him more than the most timid sympathy.

Very well, alone then!

Below him the plain skimmed past, an unchanging ocean of sub-tropical cereal, spreading to the horizon on all sides, ripening towards July-harvest. Only on the western sky-line and, more remotely, south-east, Freeman cities stood out of it. They seemed like herds of blind, brainless, rectangular animals, eternally sucking in that eternally renewed tide. The only significant proof of progress was swift growth of the Control Tower and its attendant pylons, and a molten glitter spreading along the horizon where the Gulf of Mexico marked the edge of cultivation.

The whole placid scene nettled him. His landing on the Tower summit scandalized the parking-deck attendant—it wasted fuel.

He tapped his code-signature on the tom-tom of the Director's door. Promptly, as if his approach had been monitored, a voice told him to enter—a woman's voice of sweetness so anonymous that it did not prepare him for the shock of encounter.

The face of the woman, seated on a couch with charm-school negligence, was processed for idealized anonymity too. But a face, unlike a voice, is too complex to achieve utter conformity.

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True, she had the back-drawn hair, the posed lips with their hovering smile of negligent superiority, the droop of lash and lift of brow, the ceramic perfection of finish. It had nothing to do with loveliness but it would make other women gush, "How byoootiful!" (Would that they too could master that air of serene condescension!) Yet, alas, vexatious human details always betrayed the person, squashed like a Chinese lily-foot, behind the Eternal Feminine facade. And Pahad knew this particular face rather well: he had seen it too often, its outworks dismantled, on too many a morning pillow—his ex-wife, Ruara tuan Behibi.

She smiled a perfected little, bitter-sweet smile, impossible to take hold of as a wax hand.

He recovered with gratifying promptness. Once upon a time, Ruara had possessed him like a narcotic. First of her sex, she had plied him with those automatic wiles and stimuli by which the female subjects the individual to the race. And his unfledged mind had found her a road to flaming revelation.

She, for her part, had supposed him a sort of super-Freeman. She was one of those who felt that null multiplied fifty-billion times meant Significance. Pahad was to incarnate this super-nullity.

Both had promptly learned their mistake, but not promptly enough to escape a brief, poisonous marriage. He had torn free, with the degrading misery of the rebel addict, while old warnings echoed bitterly 'I-told-you-so!' But it was better than trotting at her heels, fawning at her loathed shrines, and taking payment in doled-out drug. So his fiber had held. And he knew now, from first hand, what enemies of human delight the hormones can be. April in the Old University was his only bride forever more.

So now, after the first petty jolt, she roused only cool distaste and a wary curiosity about her presence here. She satisfied the latter even before he spoke: "Goahu'll be out in a moment. I s'pose you hadn't heard about our marriage?"

A barbarian wariness roused, as if steel had glinted among leaves by the path ahead. He shrugged: "I take no interest in

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gossip, tuantatha." He gave no inflection of respect or irony to her new rank-by-marriage.

Her retort betrayed more spite than the amusement it pretended: "Sometimes it pays, as I often told you—tuan. But you never would learn."

(And now he was to be taught? Suspicion hardened. Maybe this sudden flank-attack had been launched by no remote, indolent Council. Ruara had always hated the Old University; his stubborn refusal to transfer to some 'normal place' had been one of their rawest points of friction. Now she undoubtedly hated *him*, the Man who broke the Rules. To destroy The University and him through each-other would cure her self-assurance. Even such tepid zeal as hers, plying her charm where it counted, could make the arthritic wheels of the Hierarchy creak. And what better coign of vantage could such a petty crusader find than as consort of Goahu?)

He shrugged and sat, unbidden: "I've learned enough to keep my life from being plundered." (*That* would sting her.)

"Maybe."

"And the things I love."

"Maybe." (Being Enigmatic, she'd presently back into a give-away.)

"Oh, I've done pretty well so far." (That might be a hollow boast, but the idea was to needle Ruara. She wasn't more than routine-clever when she couldn't pull her sex on you, easy to taunt.)

Her smile was made barely perceptible: "Enjoy it while you can—tuan." (Mother knows things that Little Boys don't.)

His own smile was private and grim. The entrance of Goahu cut short the bout, but Pahad had learned something crucial. She hadn't been able to resist gloating over him and probably didn't even realize that she'd betrayed her own game. First round to Pahad! But . . . out of how many?

Goahu tuantatha Neihu was an overbred greyhound of a man, a weak throwback to some arrogant strain. His suavity was exquisite, the post of Research Director requiring a high oil-yield to the bushel. He dreamed of developing edible orchids to festoon the branches of the nut-forests, to feed new millions, and

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so to immortalize himself sublimely. He was dandling a microsyringe in his palm now. But his tinkerings would die with him.

Pahad felt a little sorry for him: Goahu was not the man to throw off a narcotic. Ruara would push him up the ladder in a daze, not by any day-dream of orchids—she was quite smart enough to see through *that*—but by demure intrigue. Goahu was as good a tool as any. Withdrawing, she slid her hand over his arm, and infatuation hung in the room, palpable as the cloying scent of orchids. Thus the Eternal Feminine played her marked card—and called it Mystery.

Goahu, however, was all kindliness to Pahad's mission: "The assignment? Oh yes! It's some stupid thing turned in by some fellow in the Marine Service, all about an alleged change in sea-level. The Programmin' Bureau thought you were *just* the man to investigate it."

"Fazum or Loheia would be much better qualified."

"You're too modest, tuan. In any case, *they* owe no Obligatory Service."

"Besides, changes in sea-level are going on all the time, quite sizable ones." Pahad almost bit his tongue, when he heard himself blurting that out. If this were a simple job, why tell his enemies so, and get something tougher?

"Oh really? Uh . . . seventy centimeters, forty of them in the past decade?" He handed over a wafer.

Pahad stared. Then: "Certainly not! That *would* be preposterous. It's true, a number of factors are combining to lower the level—we even hope to reclaim tidal shallows. But forty centimeters a decade is simply fantastic."

"Ah but, tuan, accordin' to this report, the level is *risin'*."

Pahad slapped the wafer with small regard for the august imprint of the Council.

He saw the odds imposed on him. But they only angered him now: "In that case, tuantatha, I've been set to thresh a barnful of chaff."

Goahu smiled languidly, suddenly on Pahad's side: "My dear chap, if higher echelons ask one to report on somethin' absurd, *do* it and discharge your obligation. I'll see you get your year's credit for it."

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"What about a promotion?" That was sheer impudence; but impudence paid. Promotion would be one more weapon in his one-man war. Likely it would go through channels before anyone knew about it—and rank was irrevocable.

"Tuanta? Yes. You plough this problem under, and I'll clip my recommendation to your report. So slide along and get busy, eh?" Could Goahu be glad of a chance to cheat Ruara? Could he!

CHAPTER 2

LEFT-HANDED MONKEY-WRENCH

Pahad departed with scrambled emotions: There you had it! Orchids, and a stupid woman leading the Council by the nose. Ruara hated the Hierarchy as a superfluous burden on the real business of life; Pahad despised the Hierarchy; yet it was the only place where he was not forced to walk in lock-step from germ-cell to Reclamation Plant. And now, he laughed shortly, after all his defiant victories, his Big Chance to rise in the Hierarchy was to be a matter of clearing up somebody's excitable bungling, because Ruara wanted to trip him up.

For one moment, he doubted his own certainty. *Was* sea-level receding? . . . But of course! The crest had been in the 23rd century when it had deepened the Dark Ages by flooding ports and crop-lands. Since then, it had been retreating. That was basic. In the screw-lift, he calculated swiftly how many cubic kilometers of water would be needed to raise world sea-level forty centimeters; the results were farcical.

Passing the Control Tower's Communications-Office on the roof between lift-exit and parking-deck, he checked in mid-step. Impromptu wing-shots had earned him the reputation of being a perpetual adolescent; but they sometimes paid off. He glanced

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at the project-card, noting for the first time the name and address of its author—Karlohu tua Wilele, Ceylon Marine Station. Pahad estimated the time of day in Ceylon, and turned in to the office.

He smiled satirically to himself. As the Hierarchy operated, it was entirely possible that a few well-thrust questions at the source would expose a ridiculous fallacy. If so, he thought with relish, he would stage a months-long drama of travail to convince Goahu that he was earning his year's credit and his promotion, and to keep Ruara lulled.

Seated in an alcove, staring into the blank arch of communicator, he speculated on this Karlohu tua. The name suggested a European lineage, which would explain slap-dash irresponsibility in a report—though Pahad, whose own genetic make-up was considerably more than half from that strain.

But when the screen blinked on, out scowled an almost typical Polynesian. Even the man's expression displayed the bitterness traditional for that unhappiest of all Messiah races. He said curtly, "Karlohu tua Wilele."

"Oh," said Pahad, somewhat taken aback. "Oh, may you have three kids! I am Pahad tuan Konor. I'm a geophysicist, and I've been put in charge of investigating this sea-level business. This report-wafer is yours?"

"A *tuan*, huh? Yes, it's mine. And before you say anything, I've checked hundreds of instruments dozens of times myself. I've had the records checked by technical accountants. I've consulted every blighted kind of expert, and they've all said, there must be some mistake, only they can't suggest where. *You* got any ideas, *tuan*?"

"I'll see," said Pahad, exasperated by the man's manner. (Just let anyone suspect he had a single Polynesian gene, and he cast himself as a Missioner, riding a Flame-prahu to enlighten the Lesser Breeds of Earth.) Yet, the manner at least cleared the ground. "Let me have all records. Certified ideographs."

"They're ready, tuan, waiting for someone to ask for them. You're the first."

"Good. Send them along immediately. Now, aside from official data, let's get down to plain porridge. Granting you've

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made a thorough check, how can you guarantee the old records, before your time?"

"I can't. But I've been on the job for twelve years, and the biggest rise has been in that time, and it's still going on."

(Twelve years, eh? That would account for a lot of bitterness.) "But see here, man! With any such rise as that, there'd be all sorts of obvious results. Low coasts would be flooding everywhere, for one thing."

"So strain me through fabric! Out of a dozen who've been notified of this, including big tuantuatootles up in the clouds, you're the first who's thought of *that*. The rest just proposed clever theories to show it isn't so . . . Well, tuan, since you *are* so sharp, I'll let you in on a big, big secret: low coasts *are* being flooded. I can't put that into *my* reports, because I'm only a tua and I'm not an agronomist. Contrariwise, the faint cries of crop-overseers who've lost acreage, don't reach very high. Oh, just a local subsidence. Too bad!"

"You're sure it isn't just that?"

"What! At hundreds of stations around all the continents? Take it away! Get smart! By-and-bye *They*'ll have to fit the pieces together, and *then* will we hear a scream! It may be soon, because my rough estimate for this year is another six centimeters. But time's wasting, tuan. Hustle them."

Pahad wasn't letting this bumptious insolence have the last word: "How about salt concentration? Any apparent dilution?"

Arrogance deflated gratifyingly: "I haven't checked. I will."

"Might help. I'll call back when I've seen your records."

Outside, twilight was flooding over the plain far below, creeping up dips, pooling in hollows. It mimicked the disaster in which he suddenly believed. Bitterly as he loathed the Freeman world of his birth, he responded to a threat against the Community as surely as a phagocyte in his blood to a toxin. Furthermore, *this* toxin would doom his sanctuary first of all things, without even a formality of respite.

Every few square yards of that endless plain fed a mouth. If a real flood swept away those myriad rations, no waste-land was left on any outskirt of the densely-packed globe; food was rationed to the third decimal place; and the Community main-

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tained barely a year's reserve, if this was not already eaten into by flooded-out coast-dwellers. Worse than the sea itself would be the tide of mindless panic when the truth spread. And, Pahad realized with dread, Karlohu was quite right about time running out—it was incalculably short.

He strode to his skeet with the excitement of wakening reality. But what could he *do*? He was standing alone on a slipping mountain-flank where every foot-hold betrayed him. He could count on no-one for help: Not one mind in all this hive of specialized dilettantes, he knew it in his guts, would even grasp that the danger was real; and if any did, they would not dare to help such a maverick materially. The Tuantoi-tan themselves did not believe in any danger; they had given him this task because they were blandly confident it *was* a fool's errand.

He swiftly set the skeet-controls and fumed at the warming-up delay. The towers of the Center thrust up from the mounting sea of night, a mirage that would crumble and dissolve at a whisper. But the skeet bobbed and lifted at last. Her yacht-shaped hull was buoyed, or cushioned down, by expansion or compression of helium tanks; she was driven by light, ultra-speed propellors shafted to alcohol motors of ultra-efficiency. He called her April.

As he soared and the dashing, scarlet hull, his favorite toy, flashed in the upper sunshine, his spirits too soared from their depths. This was opportunity! Danger? Borne on his own wings, he laughed at the crumbling of any mirage. He laughed at Ruara: By her own attempts to destroy the University, she had given him a chance to secure it for all time, perhaps even to restore a sister University as a reward for illustrious service . . . He daydreamed easily as he skimmed north again. . . .

The University opened out on the evening hills like hands and lifted lips welcoming back a warrior. In a world where the ideal man hardly knew where he lived, and cared little to which of half a billion eligible females he was mated, Pahad Konor both knew and cared.

His dwelling was the inner citadel of his love. To a Freeman it would have seemed as grotesque as living in a tree or cave—or a house. It was in an ancient building. He reached it from out-

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side, across the level sward, and slid open the first of its transparent frontage-panels that had not even a porch except the trees. Pahad, who had known no childhood even as tuantoi children knew it, craved to play at living in a tree or cave—or here—with his secret playmate. He entered the familiar dusk, set a light glowing, flipped curtains shut. Home! Stronghold! He filled his lungs with it, deep.

Then, like a stone breaking the pool of his felicity, a long, gray scroll on his desk intruded itself. "*Now* what?" He unsealed it and smoothed it out with an apprehension that was growing too familiar. He took seconds to realize that Karlohu's records had circled the world to meet him while he flew and walked home. They sneered, like Karlohu's face: "Look at us! Evade us, if you can, even here in your play-room."

Pahad had seen the ocean from the tame shores of pleasure resorts. But now his quiet room was filled with the ghost of great waters, tide, surf, and tempest—on the march. . . .

He skimmed through graphs, tables, and recorded speech, and recognized with mingled gloom and exultation, that everything was just as Karlohu had said. Then a new gloom blotted out mere theorizings: To detect a reason or expose a fallacy would require years of analysis, experiment, consultation, even travel —just as his enemies had reckoned—though for stakes far more reckless than they knew.

Some warrior ancestor stirred in him restively. This ledger-work pitted against the hosts of wild, white horses, was no counter-attack for a man.

And yet, what else was there to do?

And yet again, a month later, as his attendant at the Archives set down his day's budget of material, with a barely perceptible smirk, Pahad felt something more.

"Will that be all, tuan?" quoth the attendant, a dapper young tua of obtrusive competence. His suavity implied, "I should hope so, you comic nuisance."

Pahad considered the fellow's retreating back grimly. There went the Community personified. Even co-operating, they watched his struggles with an idle snicker at baffled dreams; but sneers would turn to active malice at the first sign of success.

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For he was also being officially supervised, he knew; if the Tuan-toi-tan had forgotten him for a while, Ruara would remember and keep cold eyes on him. Very likely Dapper Dan made reports.

Surely one could find some other way than playing their game, systematically tracking down hunches through mountains of chaff, surveying every neighboring field! Something in him had been growing all that month; now it strained in helpless fury against the elastic, silken threads of a cocoon. Unfamiliar thoughts and impulses stirred in embryo.

Yet already he was overly daring, defying unwritten laws. Since knowledge was power, the Community had fragmented all such knowledge as it tolerated, into feeble splinters. No decorous Hierarch presumed to know anything outside his own splinter—excepting a prescribed pap of general culture. Pahad knew that even his ineffectual excursions into other fields might be used to justify fresh punishment.

Ineffectual they surely were. Now, for example, he once more swept through the introductory rhetoric of his topic, bathygeology. For a moment, once more, he relished the delusion that his own fresh mind might turn up ideas that the hidebound specialists could not see for looking at them. Then he smashed, nose-on, against linked formulas, tortured terminology, and hair-splitting definitions; only a lifetime siege could penetrate that line built up through a thousand years to protect vested interests—and by then, the mind would be old, and a hundred more sieges to be fought.

But . . . what else was there to do? He squirmed and fretted in his cocoon. But he still pried and prodded around the outskirts of bathygeology, cadging any clue he could understand while snickers whispered around him. Till at last they materialized in the form of the dapper one, pseudo-respectfully asking, "Anything else you wish, tuan? Will we try another subheading this morning?"

"Thanks," said Pahad drily, snubbing the humoring condescension of the pup, "But get me the names of our local bathygeologists." At least, now he'd have a few questions to ask them.

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Glancing over the address-slips, he held his face impassive. The only name of any account was one whose owner he had no real wish to see. He had never thought of Nada tuan Mehimehi as a rising bathygeologist. She was a female; and he felt towards her as a man to a woman who, he suspects, has designs on him he doesn't plan to fall in with. She had twice, some months ago, singled him out in gatherings. Not that Nada wasn't eligible; very much the contrary—young but not juvenile, delectable from trim coiffure to saucy heel, and as much more human than Ruara as Ruara was than a she-Freeman. But!

Nevertheless, perversely, he arranged his appointment with her almost as a date. The prospect of playing with a pretty fire was a relief from the grinding mockery around him.

He arrived at the rendezvous well ahead of her, giving himself time to put his defenses in order. It was a dining-balcony frequented by those who felt that an occasional change from refectory routine was worth the heavy inroads on their credit. Lounging at a breezy table by the railing, overlooking the wheat-land, he reflected sardonically: Besides his immunization to women in general, Nada in particular was incompatible.

Both he and she were peculiar, but in opposite qualities. He was lean, powerful, and pearly-skinned, with ruddy, peach-bloom cheeks; some antiquary had once remarked that a conical Gallic helmet would have set off his face with its sandy hair, strong cheek-bones, and all-but-unique blue eyes; and indeed, he sometimes felt that the dark ceremonial sarong or undress loin-cloth and sleeveless vest looked like incongruous fancy-dress on him. Whereas Nada was almost too classically Polynesian to be true. Society had, in general, almost forgotten the origins of old racial types that still cropped up, much as it did the origins of words; but it was acutely and maliciously alert to ill-matching of couples. And among Pahad's other barbarian throw-backs was a vivid dislike of ridicule—as in the case of Dapper Dan. Poor Nada, he thought with detachment, she'd surely accepted all possible handicaps if she'd selected *him* as a target!

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Yet as he saw her coming briskly towards him, trim, curved, and delicately firm as a flower-bud in a tailored sarong of the bronze-red she affected, as she apologized nicely for lateness, he made the involuntary male inventory again: childlike freshness without childish dampness, softly full lips and blue-black hair that proclaimed the aristocratic race, though her skin was only a delicate eggshell brown. He'd have liked her better without those knowing touches of cosmetic, but he couldn't help being flattered that she'd applied them for his benefit. She wasn't Ruara—and he reckoned his judgment mature now; if anything, she had too much disregard for the Great Realities . . . But inventory, flatters, and concession were all in cold blood.

She exclaimed about the soup, an alleged reconstruction of an ancient recipe. With little but cereals, nuts, roots, algal products, and plankton-compress to work on, the chef-chemists here certainly did provide a range of flavors and textures that was exotic if not authentic. But she exclaimed in real surprise when she found he had provided genuine fish, tails, heads, bones and all. "Isn't it strange," she said quaintly, "when you think of the thousands of kinds of animal there used to be? And now only a few fish and insects—and laboratory animals, of course. Do you know, once I made friends with a midget lab-cat? It must have been fascinating to have things living wild, in their own right."

He agreed perfunctorily. Proud of his own unconventional ideas, he felt obligated to deplore them in others; they made him uncomfortable. Just as well, too. This Nada was disturbingly attractive. But, he thought remorselessly, if he kept just out of reach, he'd be able to use this fire to boil his own kettle. For instance, *if* he won his tuantaship, he would no longer be restricted to a single further marriage. And *if* he could give Nada the idea that this could make him matrimonially reckless, perhaps he'd enlist her personal interest in helping him to get the promotion. And serve her right, if it didn't pay off for her.

Helpfully, she broke in on his silence: "You said you had something to talk about?"

Most specialists had condescended to hear him with irrele-

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vant curiosity, impatience, or sociability. In spite of himself, the live interest in her voice stimulated him. He told her as much of the problem as he dared tell anyone.

She listened attentively. He had not previously seen quite that trim set to her mouth, that searching vitality in her eyes. But her first comment was acid: "I might have known it would be something like *that*."

The mild taunt only stiffened his bachelor resolve. He went on to relate briefly his efforts so far and their blank failure.

She hung on his narrative as if it were of absorbing interest rather than a catalogue of frustrations. "Absolutely no theory at all?"

"Oh, a dozen theories; but none that holds water—not *that* much water anyway. You see, it all shakes down to two possibilities: Either all the land-masses are subsiding at once, which is fantastic; or billions of tons of something are being added to the oceans."

"Which is just as fantastic, isn't it?"

He hesitated; surely *she* should know better than that! But the live interest had glided over into a synthetic hanging-on-his-words, not at all unlike Ruara managing you. Her probable motive was to intrigue him by sympathy. He said, wryly, "No, not quite. After all, it *has* happened."

"*Has* it?" She was no longer a keen bathygeologist scrutinizing a problem, but a pretty little Island doll looking up to a big, austere scientist.

"Why, of course; in the Late Cretaceous for one example. Billions of tons *were* added, and plains were drowned all over the world."

"Oh! You mean in geo*log*ical times." She posed herself over the table with a slightly overdone attentiveness. (Surely she wasn't *that* naïve, to fancy he'd let himself be harvested by such a stock, flatter-the-big-dope technique.) "But I've never understood, really. I thought the continents wrinkled and sank. Where would all that much water come from?"

He considered her derisively. What a geologist! Maybe not so smart after all. "From glaciers, my dear."

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"Dear me! I never realized there were *that* many glaciers."

"Not if you stick to plain glaciers, no. But you've got to count the ice-caps—Greenland, Baffin, Antarctica, and so on. If *they* melted, they'd raise sea-level over fifty meters." He gestured at the plain below: "These hills would be islands and the surf would be rolling in just below us."

She gave him a cryptic look. "Hm! That might be interesting."

He regarded her with growing contempt: "Well—if you look on the collapse of the Race as entertainment." He groped for an epigram, but the menace was too big. "Maybe half the human race would have to die childless . . ." Horrible. And yet it wasn't what he meant . . .

Airily disregarding his rebuke, she switched back to the main topic, "Well, aren't we entering a cycle of increasing warmth, didn't I hear somewhere? Wouldn't *that* solve your problem?"

He smiled gently and hoped it needled her: "Yes, we are. But actually the polar caps *grow* during a warm phase. Therefore, we know quite definitely that the ocean should be *falling*—in fact, it *was* falling, very slowly, when they checked a century ago. Apparently, we've been so sure, that nobody's checked adequately since."

She made big eyes at him: "That seems awfully strange—that the ice grows in a warm cycle, I mean."

"Yes, doesn't it? But if you boil a kettle in a room with cold windows, the steam will condense on the windows. You see, the poles never get anywhere thawing, and the vapor from the steaming tropics condenses in the ice-caps."

"That sounds to me like one of those theories that are just too clever to be true. Of course I don't know much about the *surface* of the Earth. But I bet it's wrong."

For a moment, the notion was terribly tempting: There was his release! Figure some way to discredit the condensation-theory, and he could harvest all he wanted: reprieve for the University, rank, power in his search for the real root of the menace. Maybe it would backfire later. But then, someone else could worry.

He shook his head: "M-mh! That theory's just about as well

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grounded as anything could be. Even if it *were* wrong, I'd have to spend years disproving it." (And let *that* cool her enthusiasm.)

"What about CO_2?" She said it with a pussy-mouthed air of simple-little-woman-points-out-what-conceited-men-overlooked.

In spite of exasperation, he had to confess bafflement: "Well, *what* about it?"

"I believe if it increases in the atmosphere, it steps up absorption of heat from the sun. There's a theory that all that vegetation in the Carboniferous locked up all the carbon in coal beds, and that was what brought on the ice-ages—a feed-back, sort of. So, if there were *too* much CO_2, that might help to melt your old ice-caps, mightn't it?"

"Mm!" He was intrigued enough to repress personal vanity and his deep-set contrariness. "It's just possible—assuming that you're right and raised temperature *doesn't* increase the ice-caps. Now we've only got to find where the CO_2 might come from, instead of the water."

"I can tell you that too." (She was as demure as Ruara tried to be.) "There's been an enormous lot of volcanic activity recently, didn't you know? Increasing too." She rose: "I must run now. Thank you for the *mar*vellous lunch."

Her rear, departing, was as pert as her front had been approaching; in fact, it had a little waggle as if she were mighty pleased with herself. And well she might be, of course, if she'd provided the first clue to his puzzle, confirmed the superiority of her sex and her own superiority therein, and at the same time removed one main obstacle to his desired advances. She shared with Ruara a lot of the objectionable feminine traits, he ruminated. Yet she was human enough to be dangerous.

Her make-up, for example, was applied, not tattooed on. And her smartness . . . well, it wasn't *only* the eternal feminine focussed on outsmarting the male, like a chess-paranoid whom you could outplay only if you gave up everything else yourself. No; she had more, however sketchy; she left you with no feeling that you were safe as long as you didn't play her one game. With her . . . you were never safe.

He sprang up. Well, her idea was worth following up anyway.

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CHAPTER 3

NOW YOU SEE IT AND . . .

Three pentads later, he wasn't so sure. The thing was a blighted phantom like the lights that danced over algae-tanks; now you had an answer under your hand, and now the next clue was on the far side of some cursed specialty. Dapper Dan watched him with an air that suggested the situation was food for perennial comic reports in Dan's own circle as well as more serious ones elsewhere. Fighting as an outlaw against towering odds had its compensations for the ego; serving as a butt for underlings, had not. Each morning, Pahad took up the crazy trail without optimism; each evening found his pessimism justified.

Yet something stiffened in him, the chitin of some winged thing hardening in the cocoon. The arched rafters and dusk of the Archive reading-room were his chrysalis, and he moved forwards by tiny, linked steps in his work, and by parallel steps within himself. Let Ruara spy. Let Dan snicker. In the growing embryo, one rudimentary organ ripening, triggers the start of another, building.

Early in the fourth pentad, relentless logic sent him on another quasi-goose-chase. An aeroponics expert, no less! Even his grim patience balked a little at that.

But when the apartment door opened to his tattoo, he knew that he had a break at last. That creamy mop of hair and mahogany character-face, those quarters as outrageously individual as Pahad's own! No wonder the name, Avor tuantatha Dohano, had bothered him. Aeroponics, indeed! Officially, yes, of course. But this was the old celebrity with the scandalous reputation as a scientific wild-man—too shrewd, too uncomfortable for the Council, outspoken despiser of the Council. Pahad had listened in refectory a dozen times to scraps of scorching ridicule from this fellow debating at the Senior Table. Meeting him face to face was almost intimidating. But marsh-fires suddenly focussed into a steady flame of hope.

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And Avor fetched him in heartily, produced cups and polta (that disreputable compromise between narcotic and legal food), and displayed a lively, most unspecialized interest in atmospheric CO_2. He immediately pooh-poohed the volcanic theory: "*That* little flurry? Wouldn't account for a millionth of a percent. Things had to blow wide open for ten-thousand years to make any significant difference. Was that your own notion?"

Would Avor despise him for feeble guesses or admire him for knowing *any*thing outside his own specialty? One sensed that he *would* despise a liar; and one never knew by what channels truth might percolate. Besides, honesty was congenial: "As a matter of fact, I got it from Nada tuan Mehimehi."

"Oh? Now what's *she* up to? She's been playing some droughted tricky game ever since she came here eight years ago. I don't trust a woman like that. Never know what bones she's got grinning under that innocent skin of hers."

Though the conflagration of polta was kindling from stomach to brain, Pahad censored his own opinions as to her game. He shrugged: "She *could* just have been giving me information. It *is* done, you know."

"Pah! *She* knows more about volcanoes than *that*. Dabbles in everything—like me." He smiled like a huge idol, then suddenly probed from under tangled eyebrows: "You thinking of teaming up with her, by any chance?"

Pahad's native obstinacy, reinforced by polta, set him agin' the government as usual: "A man could do worse. She has everything—and a few extras." (And no matter if that *did* get back to her.)

"Yes—a man *could* do worse." Avor's chuckle was half grunt. He fell silent.

But now Pahad's brain was steered back to that topic. Nada certainly *did* dabble; for anyone so plain stupid and ignorant about her own general field, she knew a lot that had nothing whatsoever to do with it. Volcanics, fair enough; but—atmospherics, feed-backs, climate cycles? And all pat, like Arctic wheat at the first sunbeam. Well, if it only led to a man, a she-Heirarch could be clever about anything—even Ruara's window-dressing had fooled him—when he was callow.

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Avor looked up from contemplating his own massive hands on his knees: "Well, it's your business. But maybe she's right about this CO_2."

Pahad drew stimulation from anyone (even Nada) who really knew something: "Tuantatha, does the actual source matter just now? Let's see if there *is* a fluctuation. Then I can worry about the source."

"Good man! You go to the roots of things. True, very true."

"But I can find no records."

"I warrant you can't. It just so happens that I'm the one person on Earth who can give them to you. Handy, eh? My Memorial Legacy to the Archives is to be on the distribution of atmospheric gases, geographic and historic. Amusing, but useless —till now."

Pahad warmed to the old boy, and not only on account of hope. What a stimulus if you could get to know him! "But Legacy work mustn't be shown before presentation."

"Footra! They've boxed my life into this little cell. Blighted, if they're going to come over me with their footling regulations. The whole universe pivots on the Rights of Freemen; what about a few Rights for *me*? Son, you're the first man around here since Tartax died, with a head *and* guts. I only wish we could work together more. But my time's short . . . Tell me: what are *you* getting out of this?"

"It's my Obligatory."

"So you fight it like a demon? Chaff-pudding! You were the young fellow who got up in that aborted Assembly, back in the Spring, and told that moldy potato from Council where his boundary-line ran. What's going on?"

It may have been polta, but Pahad told the old man more than he had dreamed of telling Nada, and ended with startling candor: "It's the University really. I want it to live my life out in and enjoy what's left to be enjoyed, in quiet and security."

Avor glared steadily. Then: "What an embryo *you* are! End your life in quiet and security, says you! Man, you're . . . Well, never mind. None of my business—yet. How long have you lived in this opium-den?"

"I left school at eighteen, tuantatha. Came here and worked

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as a student under Chotha and your friend Tartax for six years. And I've been on the faculty since then—eight years."

"Fourteen years, hey? That's a devil of a long time to be a caterpillar. I suppose you had that Freeman background to live down. Only . . . if something doesn't trigger you, you can be a caterpillar all your life, I suppose—like me; store energy for nothing. Well, *you* should have stored enough by now for anything. Don't let yourself develop into a wingless wonder. *Do* something, and be blighted to what anybody says."

"I'm doing what I can, tuantatha."

"That's right! By your lights, you *are*. Carry on and you may get a broader view."

Pahad didn't quite see how any view could grow much broader than saving a world and his own ideals. He murmured a respectful banality.

Avor grunted: "Well, let's give you *my* little contribution, and see what you make of *that*."

He toddled over to a cabinet, unlocked, opened, pulled out and pushed in, searched more and more impatiently, finally bursting out: "Blight and smut! That's the abortion of letting subordinates make free with your files. I'm *very* sorry, tuan. More than you'll appreciate. But if I don't locate the originals in a few days, I've a dozen tus and tuas spoiling their leisure by having too much of it, and we'll work up a set from original data for you. Call me next pentad."

Walking home, Pahad was buoyant at first. How different life would be in company like *that*! Maybe Nada too . . . Man, how much he'd accomplished, enlisting Nada's wits and Avor's rebel intelligence. Supposing he went directly to people like that, instead of waiting till he got around to them through the files—as he had in both cases?

Then his mercurial red-headed spirits plummeted: Yes, but he was still in a mess without beginning or end, like one of those nightmares where one is set maniac tasks such as walking barefoot to another galaxy; and if he ever got there, they'd tell him it was the wrong galaxy. He had to shout an alarm that would shake men out of sloth before terror blared its own presence.

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And his voice was a squeak. As if by a dogging fatality, he hadn't even gotten Avor's records yet!

But pentads slipped by again, expended on heaps of chaff doubly dry now that he had hope elsewhere. He began to feel like a rat in a maze, chivvied by implacable forces as he scuttled from dead-end to dead-end. Nor did his new hope materialize. Avor was out; Avor was gruffly apologetic—no results yet. Nothing but his obstinacy kept Pahad from slacking off.

Therefore, when Nada called him, slipping on-stage again as if at some inaudible cue, he was softened up for her. She was not tart over his long silence, but dulcet: "I saw you in Archives today. You didn't even notice me and you looked terribly tired. It gave me an idea."

"I *am* tired. I'm still working on your last idea."

"Well, this one may compensate. I'm attending a convention at a rather nice Resort, and I can invite anyone. Would you care to come? It would be a rest, and you'd meet some rather interesting people."

Pahad's opinion of conventions was: people you didn't know, making stop-gap reports on topics that bored you. Interesting people? More likely, int'resting. Breaking him in to her crowd, eh? Yet he agreed, with his usual impulsiveness. Playing with fire *would* amuse him, and Avor's comments on the fire had made it even more intriguing. Anyway, a little vacation would fill time till Avor got around to producing.

CHAPTER 4

HOW DEAR TO MY HEART . . .

Yet, in the pentad intervening, he found himself thinking entirely too much about Nada. And in her skeet, en route for the Resort, he savagely scored himself off for letting himself be

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cornered. At least, if she were really setting her cap for him, she was too clever to press it. She curled delectably among the cushions but that, he conceded, was probably no more deliberate than the way her lashes curved up. She *was* pretty: The lashes, when lowered, stood out against her damask cheek as velvet-black as her open eyes. But he dismissed with contempt all the traditional, and all the day-dream, gambits of the hierarch class for getting ahead with this made-to-order situation. In an odd way, he liked her too much.

Besides, you don't make love when you're on edge.

The endless pulley-belt of landscape unwinding, three thousand feet below, hypnotized him unpleasantly. Looking out over the ocean of food from the headland of the University was one thing; flights from University to Tower were mere pleasure jaunts; but *this* was like drifting on a raft in the center of an implacable horizon—without water, without hope.

More than ninety percent of land surface, from isthmus to ice-pack, was subjected to nourishing the enormous swarms of the Race—the only significant animal surviving. Every human being, but especially a Hierarch was conscious of nutrition and population as earlier cultures had been conscious of finance, of law, of sin, of feud. All possible area was massed with meta-cereal, perennial, self-nitrifying, absorbing a fantastic percent of solar energy to yield up to a dozen crops a year, depending on latitude. The science of two-thousand years had been able to extort no greater bulk of human pablum from a given area and energy supply—naturally or synthetically. That bulk was estimated annually as a continent-covering sheet, exactly so many centimeters, millimeters, microns thick. The Hierarch was consecrated to the goal of adding yet another micron to that sheet, more rabidly than any financial maniac to piling up to his millions, any samurai to maintaining his honor.

They had terraced steep slopes for heavily prolific tubers and legumes; crowned the hills with overloaded nut-forest, which doubled as a sponge for irrigation, and as the source of miserly-rationed fuels; they had made deserts a semi-mythical legend; blasted down and tamed all but the most savage crags; filled lakes, and dyked shallows. History was the holy roll-call of the

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great Food-bringers. And behind those efforts the numbers of the Race pressed achingly against limits that stretched ever more slowly; and behind the Race, through the Race, thrust and craved the Great Realities for the enjoyment of which humanity was at last Free, the Plasm, the Cycle, the Mystery of Appetite. Before these dominions and powers, the intelligence of the Hierarch was a lesser thing, an unfortunate servant to be bribed and exploited. The Hierarch was happy only because he was creating more Life vicariously.

Pahad, wrestling as no Hierarch in centuries had wrestled, to both create and preserve more Life, was not happy.

What blind fret drives the dragonfly nymph upwards against the sodden mat of debris entombing it?

The hundred-kilometer counter clicked over and over on the control-panel. Pahad's eyes brooded on the circular map below them, that never changed for all their feverish speed. The Freeman cities slid up, slid under, slid behind, the digits of a repeating decimal. The oppressive grandeur of man's ultimate triumph in subjecting all Earth to his appetites, became suffocation. Life may accept Finis. Mind revolts. Dead-end, the repeating decimal, is Finis as surely as death. The subjugated continent, unchanging around them, unchanging on into eternity, was a cell, a coffin against which fists beat punily.

He was roused out of that subconscious nightmare by Nada fussing with the controls. These were supposed to be set on automatic, and the need to touch them at all was so odd that he moved over quickly. Her brows were puckered daintily: "I don't know *what's* wrong with this thing. But I think we'd better land and have it checked."

"You're the pilot," he said between sardonic amusement—she had refused to come in *his* skeet—and curiosity—skeets *never* failed.

"Let's see: the Guide says City SE37 is just ahead. They *make* skeets."

A horrible qualm flushed through him: "They do it without the slightest idea of what they're doing, a thousand separate steps and each one done all his life by a unit who doesn't know what it is for—or care."

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"That's impossible! They'd go mad."

"You don't know Freemen. They envy the ones with the simplest jobs. Anyway, it's only for a couple of hours a day. And mostly they can watch the shows while they work. For repairs we'll have to go to a Science Center."

She was airily obstinate: "But the nearest Center is our own. We don't want to go back. Anyway, this place *has* a service unit. The Guide *says* so."

She could very well be right. He had only been warding her off blindly. They hadn't made skeets at . . . his . . .

As the City loomed, a dormant panic boiled up in him undiminished by its long sleep, prickled his temples and gripped his belly. A hate, a helpless fear, a long agony of resistance.

Nada, unheeding, made radio contact. And the Voice came through, the voice he had not heard for twenty years—speaking, as if by rote, the accepted phrases, with the exact hygienic vacancy.

He beat down his quivering nausea: ("That was twenty years ago. You were a child. You're a man now, tuantoi, Pahad tuan. They wouldn't know you even in . . . where . . . You're a stranger, a respected visitor.") Yes, you could hold even airsickness in check by force of will—even this.

But the City was indistinguishable from—that other: perhaps a thousand rectangular units; their faces lined with windows, like pages of type, the same forgotten letter in meaningless repitition; the windows were masked by banks of solar mirrors turning sunwards like blind polyps, to convert the useless light into power; the roofs were laid out in specialized vegetable plots. A City produced almost as much food, area for area, as Cropland. Nothing moved at the windows: nothing moved on the roofs.

But the first human unit they saw, flagging them in to the roof hangar, was—unchanged, dressed in the orange coverall perfected a thousand years ago. A long-interred memory arose and gibbered feverishly: As a child, he had never found out for real sure if you got back the same coverall from the cleanser, or just another like it. Grim whimsy steadied him like raw liquor.

Then, as they stepped out of the skeet in the vast, girdered

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hall, nightmare took flesh in the figure approaching, the female coverall with naked midriff prescribed for allure, the walk, the Face.

Ninety generations of convergent breeding for Perfect Motherhood, the Cosmetic Rituals, the Social Loveliness Projects, still left distinctions between most women if you looked closely. This *wasn't* his mother; the eyes were lighter, the tattoo-stained lips barely fuller. But it was the Face, and it took the ancient, composite hold over him . . .

Out of primal stirrings, nuzzlings, filled belly, and removed excreta, the Face grew. It was a universal symbol of security, of sated appetites, of guidance. In his own unit or a neighbor unit, in Project Center, corridor, refectory, the Face bent over him; one went away, and another just like it took its place. You knew your usual one and gradually learned to distinguish the rest. As words and phrases took form, they were part of the Face: "No, dear, the Community doesn't want *you to do that.", "You must do like* this, *dear, or People will think you're Different.", "Now, dear, it's The Time to . . ."*

For normal children the Face grew and merged with the Community, the Plasm, the Rituals, the Cycle—all the Great Realities. But, as he grew, he struck out against this greater Thing that pressed in on every side; and through it, he learned to hate the Faces that were part of it, by and bye even his own Face. Normal children were blankly docile, content; Pahad could not remember when he had first felt his Self fighting. There had been frightened conferences, several Faces at once murmuring, himself holding back dourly; he would not *let them buy him with food and fondling. He didn't know why . . .*

He glanced at Nada. He had called her an Island doll. Now, in comparison with the Eternal Woman, she was infinitely alive and precious in her selfness, vivid, unique in all eternity—whether he himself wanted her, or not.

The Freeman woman was talking in a stilted way, phrases learned by rote, under protest, for dealing with the Tuantoi: "I be-lieve it would not be good to look for the trouble. It would be bet-ter . . ."

But from near-by male figures, yellow, violet, maroon, moving

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indolently around skeet hulls, he could hear a more familiar speech: The corrupt neo-Polynesian of the tuantoi class had been glorified in the Cities; it had been perfected to that essence of simplicity, that terse dealing with Immediate Reality always sought by speech-reformers and champions of down-to-earth humanity. You could not even say that it had simplified grammar or vocabulary; it had abolished both. The possible events of Freeman life were easily foreseen and classified; and for each, a phrase sufficed. These phrases had been derived from words smeared together; but only some tuanto pedant would trouble to disengage the common root from such utterances as, "Gim-me-a-bowlaporr'ge" and "Shegimma fondembrace" any more than a normal Atlantean would from "sanguine" and "consanguinity." No, a phrase was a phrase. They were passed down in hallowed songs, all that anyone could possibly need for any purpose.

The men, here, each had a few work-phrases too, as the women had baby-, food-, and clothing-phrases. Males, not being responsible for the Next Generation, were forced into the work where they had to vary a little more, both in speech and behavior; some of the worst variants did the Nasty-things-that-haddabe-Done (but not mentioned), things that took one outside the warm circle of universal human conduct, repairs, the irregular work of cropping, manufactures. Females, however made all necessary contacts with the Tuantoi; they were less likely to be corrupted with crazy ideas. His own father, for example . . .

Nada's conference with a group of Freeman mechanics (much more concerned with gawping at the tuantoi than with the skeet) ended in a decision that the easiest thing would be to replace the whole misbehaving motor, which would take about an hour.

"Let's wait in the skeet," said Pahad, careless of how it sounded.

"Gracious no! I've never been in a City. I want to *see*."

"Well, go ahead. It's pretty—boring, to me. I'll wait here where it's comfortable."

"What's come over you, Pahad? Come on. I don't think these

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—people—would tell me very much. Where would I get a guide?"

In spite of his hanging back, Pahad's first funk was passing off, and a new vista was emerging like a fade-in on a pansensor. He had hung on to his will-to-resist, and now both emotion and reason were rallying around that center. Starvation! Suppose he could walk out of here immune, master of his past! For twenty years, he'd been building a Self like Nada's. Now let it stand up and hit back, instead of cowering! Then he'd be really free as he never had been in all those years.

At the very idea, the blood flowed cleaner through his brain. He said, "That's true; they don't supply guides. That woman you spoke to first would show you anything you *asked* to see. They're conditioned to co-operate with tuantoi, up to a point. Remember, we're not venerable to them, just freaks with certain privileges. They make skeets for us, and so on, because we're useful and must have something to console us for all the great things we're missing. So she'd oblige; but she certainly wouldn't say much."

"All right then, let's walk around till we see her. She can sponsor and you explain." As they strolled, she prattled on, "I always had the impression they were sort of gloomy, just robots. They look *gay* in those clothes."

"The first billion would—if you didn't look too closely."

"I see what you mean . . . *Why* are they called Freemen?"

"Because they *are* free, to do exactly what their ancestors always wanted to do."

She switched back in her usual zig-zag style: "Of course, these are just working clothes. I suppose they have sarongs and so on at home?"

"My dear girl, even one extra set of costumes for everybody would cut the Baby Ration two or three percent. In their units they do strip down to briefs and halters; it's supposed to thrill your mate, and I suppose it does for the first pentad or so—after that, it saves clothes without letting them droop uncomfortably. No, you have five of those suits which you wear in rotation; you return one to be pulped and get a replacement every hektad."

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"Even the *women*?"

He rallied a grin: "Well, finery was claimed to be one of the Fundamental Rights for a long time. But it finally gave way to more basic things; it's ancient history now, except for the cosmetics. The rest was Woman's ultimate sacrifice to the Great Realities."

"Hm! They don't waste *any*thing, do they?"

He burst out savagely, "They live for the *purpose* of wasting nothing—so there can be more Freemen to waste nothing, so there can be more Freemen. Waste is a crime against creating more Life. One must create as much Life as possible, mustn't one?"

"It makes our simplest luxuries seem wicked," she said thoughtfully, then broke off. "Oh, a pansensor! Do they . . . ?"

"You never *have* been in a City, have you? My dear, a Freeman has his Public Duty of two hours' work a day; he sleeps ten—or at least spends it in bed—and spends one in refectory and one at the Evening Assembly. What would he do with the other ten that wouldn't consume resources or upset the Little Cycles? One of the Rules of Real Living is, 'A pansensor is *better* than reality because it has no Consequences.'"

She fell silent, gazing about; and he sank into the past again:

He was older now: He had learned the importance of the incessant movement and sound that churned in the alcove of each unit. He had wakened slowly to half-comprehension of a wondrous world—lost lands and magnificent peoples, lovely, defiant women and splendid, defiant men, daring ventures for incomprehensible prizes, sea-wind in burnished sails, swift combat with incomprehensible weapons, sky-stabbing peaks, and flaming take-offs beyond the sky itself . . . Then, the abrupt, shattering dictum that those *things were the Bad part, that the Good things were the lavish indulgences of people in primitive days, and Our Founders, like the legendary Belugo, winning Everything for the Community, and the triumph of the Great Realities.*

He'd submitted at first, of course, with the child's fear of being different. But as he unfolded into a new phase that hadn't been bred out of his stock by ninety generations of selective

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breeding for docility, he had rebelled again, more furiously but more slyly: He *was right, and the rest were different from* him. *He hugged this secret, half in terror half in joy, defiant like the Bad People in the pansensor. He walked alone, cloaked in his invisible defiance—no, not alone, befriended by the Bad People. Had there been any cult of devil-worshippers, he would have been a precocious candidate.*

Nada was watching the performance in complete puzzlement: "*What* is going on in that program?"

"A sara game." Figures in part-colored tights postured and darted. If you clipped electrodes behind your ears, as a score of workers had done in lethargic time-off, you could feel the balcony rail, get a tantalizing taste of a sweetish drink, even have your endocrines fillipped to a ghost of excitement . . .

"Oh! Do they play *games*?"

"My dear Nada, no! That would require intelligence and valuable energy, exertion. They *watch* games—or rather, they watch the records of games. This one was played maybe a thousand years ago. They've got enough filed to last three generations without repeating. Then they start over again as good as new. Every Freeman spends four hours a day watching to see how the Games come out. That leaves six for Dramas."

"But—but how can it *possibly* interest them if they don't play themselves? And anyway, wouldn't they *know* the results in advance?"

"How? The laborer whose duty it is to go down every day and put the next set of cartridges in the hopper, and yesterday's back in the rack, has no idea of what's in them. In fact, there's no way for him to find out till the projection comes through."

"Well, but—wouldn't they *talk* about specially exciting ones? sort of pass things down?"

"*None* of them are exciting beyond the time you watch them —if then. If they showed the same ones over every year, maybe someone would remember. But who's going to pass any detail out of the mass down to the fourth generation? Try again."

"But—mightn't somebody keep a record, just out of curiosity?"

"A record? How? What with? Get this into your head, tuan:

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nothing before getting up this morning and after bedtime tonight is of the slightest interest to a Freeman; except, of course, his wedding if he isn't married yet, or his children's if he is. Why should anyone have material for keeping records? And why should he have curiosity if he did?"

She sighed, baffled: "Well, but, the Dramas—how can ancient Dramas mean anything to them?"

"It's like Atlantean-era religions that used still more ancient languages. You understand according to your capacity. *I* understood."

Yes, and his understanding reinforced his resolve to cherish the Bad things and reject the Good, outwitting the sweet, obliterating social face that bent over him: "But mother, I don't want *to watch. I want to go up to my garden on the roof." (Little, real, yellow insects on his mango-plants. Clouds on the horizon.) "Pahad, you frighten me. How do you learn to* say *such things?* No *child goes on the roof at This Time. People would think you were Different. Now, sit and watch this; it's* funny.", *"What's 'funny' mean, mother?" But she couldn't tell him . . .)*

Nada had sighted and flagged down the receptionist-woman, who obeyed and led them off indifferently. Nada prattled on: "What! No lifts?"

The woman explained solemnly with ritual phrases: "The energy would be stolen from Food. That is why our buildings are not high. Your high towers bring you close together so that you can create more Life quickly. But *we* are not forced to move about as you do. Each of us has Happiness, just where he is."

Blinded, Pahad could still have gone down the stairs and pictured the top residential level. A corridor tapered out of sight, dim-lit, divided off precisely as a ruler by doors of living-units. It was said: You can walk into a Community anywhere and be at home. He was drawn into suffocating depths, his lungs fighting for life. When their guide turned down a side-corridor and opened a door, he knew it would be into the food-distributing unit of the block—all blocks were arranged that way because it saved. He remembered, as if from this morning, the perfectly functional, perfectly economical bowls and cups unloading from

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a dumb-waiter in yellow, scarlet, blue, maroon stacks. The shift on duty laid them in rows to be filled for the next meal; hand-work saved Energy, saved Life, and besides, it didn't matter. Then, their job done, they streamed out gaping sidelong at the visitors.

Pahad said, "They're going to Evening Assembly. Do you want to see that, Nada?"

"Oh, very much!" said Nada instantly, "We can't stay through it, of course. But I *must* see it. It must be wonderful!"

They followed the stream of colored coveralls along inevitable passages and around inevitable turnings.

Suddenly Pahad's resolve to fight himself free, confronted the ultimate black horror: After his fancied escape, it was claiming him again. The old, hateful adoration sucked him on—but now there was no future to dream of—the future was past. He had escaped, and It had drawn him back.

The women's voices came to him like voices through a fever: Nada vivaciously, "Like the cells of a body." the woman, contentfully, "Yes, tuanto. I can see you are really one with us, a true cell of our brain. Some day you may leave your weary work and truly join us. But the Body is not just one Block or one City; it is the whole Earth!"

His fevered mind recalled snatches of what it had known in health: "A body, but not human, a polyp, digesting all tomorrows into an endless today. Even polyps had evolved; out of their myriads, in the gulfs of ocean and time, a few seized on some wild, improbable chance and escaped from Perfection. But this Body is One and it has a cunning to reject and destroy all deviations . . ."

They entered the balcony from which this Level participated in the Gatherings—twenty Levels, five balconies. But something was gratingly out of joint: *that* was *his* place, two balconies down, opposite! Then—who was this, standing here?

It didn't matter. As a hush swept over the massed forty thousand of the assembled Block, he could feel It drawing his mind out of him, whoever he was, the horrible caress, the overpowering lust to possess him utterly: "Merge! *I* am the only reality,

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the Plasm. Give up your paltry Self. Everything for the Community."

But his paltry Self, submerged, shaken, whimpering with desire to be possessed, and with fear, still hung by cramped fingers to hope, and taunted back "And the Community? For what is *that*?"

The Assembly swayed physically towards an ultra-pansensor that began to weave a trance. A wordless chant rose along the packed rows, guided by a subhuman beat from the instrument; it swelled into a hypnotic, mindless, rising-and-falling ululation, unschooled to beauty or to any meaning but monotonous craving. Fragments of the traditional songs "burn-unkisus", "dine-thoutchuh" dissolved like grains of sugar in a formless syrup. The meagre gamut of Freeman life, from oral to anal, sank through vaguer and vaguer symbolism to a sort of chemical lust. The feeding-breeding instinct had lost contact with any other experience and sank below ameba level.

Even without the head-electrodes, Pahad's memory felt the indescribable, ghostly contact, like a kissing, sucking, spreading mouth: "Come to me. I am the Answer. Surrender thought to my beat. Surrender shape to my nothingness. Let your humanness drain back to me, not strain for the stars. Come to me. I am Fulfilment. Be and spawn; all else is folly . . ."

The overwhelming mesmerism was swollen by forty-thousand minds groping towards the bliss of Merging. In two-hundred other blocks of the City, the ritual was progressing, in four-hundred Cities of the time-zone, moving on each hour in a ceaseless wave rolling about Earth, the Adoration of the Plasm.

The loathed rapture seeped through channels he had thought dry forever, a corrupt hunger to yield to the spiritual rape. But even as his will faded, his ultimate self tore his eyes free. (Almost he could see the Face bending over him: "Pahad, if you stir, People will Notice." No, not People—It!)

Then, in a back row, he saw a woman, old and repulsive by City standards. And instantly, he *knew;* alone and without his escape, she still held back and fostered a white-hot grain of self. Telepathy? Or just her live face in the porridge of gaping masks? Like his father's face . . .

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His father! The child in him, stripped naked, strained towards the glimmer that had guided the child to daylight: the coppery head, gaunt and lonely, too Different even for a male; the mind, an oak stunted in a cupful of soil, yet Different enough for the obscene, solitary job of prowling about on electric maintenance; the clandestine, marvellous moment of communion that even It could not spy out and abolish; a glimpse of something more divine than Community-for-Nothing, than the Cycles of feeding and breeding and belonging. A remnant of such throw-backs still held the germ of a future, like mummy wheat. Their courage lifted him like a forlorn, splendid rallying-shout. A talisman had been passed down to him; he would pass it on!

His mind emerged clean from the dissolving Thing, broke pace from Its pulse, became an entity not a solute. He took command of his Self again. He, not Nada, turned to the exit.

Their guide came somnambulantly. As if clinging to her embrace with the Thing behind, she recited raptly, "But more wonderful than a hive or body. *We* have Love. We are all parts of one Plasm. And *We* are more than cells; we come and go."

(Then, life had fought upwards incredibly, heroically, for a billion years, so that Freemen might oscillate from bed, to pansensor, to food intake, to instinctive Service, to Assembly seat, to waste outlet, to pansensor, to bed.)

A hastening group of young, with attendant, passed. The Face was as troubled as it could ever be. Disaster! She had transgressed some Little Cycle, and deprived the Next Generation of a Happiness, a precious decimal of training. She would enter the Assembly Different!

He hastened in that troop, his face schooled to anxiety, his heart tempestuous with hate. He had gone to his first Training Project in ecstasy: now *his actions* would *have Consequences, like those of his heroes . . . And He had been struck down again instantly with mutilated wings: Even to Serve outside the rituals, wrongly or too much, was to be Different. He nursed the bleeding stump of his hopes away from the eyes of the Project Guides*—they *could hardly conceive such deformity in a child—but not from the half-frightened, half-vindictive eyes of the other children, whose minds were not yet stiffened to blindness.*

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Stepping through a cell-door to freedom, he found himself in the torture-chamber itself.

A blast of mortal enmity swept from him now over the bustling line of blank, perfect little faces, leaving only a bitter dust of memories.

In his bitterness and rebellion, he conceived a crime amazing in a child, cloaked from suspicion by its very monstrous improbability: To learn, to win powers, he insinuated himself into Project Groups that were not part of his Life Pattern. Maybe his parents were subconsciously uneasy about his abnormally extensive absences; normal Freemen had difficulty in conceiving anything wrong. But nothing happened till, one morning, as they slept, he was letting himself out on such a mission. He turned, to close the door silently, and froze. His father was watching him from the bed.

True, his father had told him many things they both knew were unlawful, burned chaff in a bowl to show him flame, taken him on tiny furtive expeditions to see wiring or other marvels. But this, that his son was doing now, was so utterly evil, so Different, that surely he must denounce it to the dreadful Tuantoi! Pahad fell through whirling depths of terror. Then, like a steadying hand, a trace of smile flitted over the lean face, the red-brown eyes closed peacefully . . .

The guide had paused: "This unit is vacant. Wanna see it, tuantoi?" She recited woodenly, "It is a two-child unit. There are also one-child units, and no-child for the first three hektads of marriage and after the sixteenth year when the children are married. There is a Corridorabliss for Model Families who are granted a third child when a bonus is won." She avoided, of course, referring to those secluded horrors for wretched steriles who were unfit for even the Patrol. She opened the door with reverence, and there it was! Any place on Earth, the same unit perfected for perfect Happiness, shaped to the prescribed, least-possible motions habitual from childhood. His father might have looked at him from that very bed!

He saw it all now from far enough away to puzzle without revulsion: History had been a process of the Great Realities emerging. Wasteful action and burdensome thought, weary

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knowledge and needless skill had been shed. The Great Realities themselves, breeding and feeding, gaping and swarming, had been perfected; mates had ever less to distract them from Fondumb-race; children had to learn only the Cycles; the pansensor replaced energy-wasting motion. All alike had these Realities, the heritage of a thousand years of progress. Only the tuantoi received a further dole, to be repaid tenfold. Difference was theft. Difference denied Rightness. Difference was blasphemy.

But why, he mused, not communal dormitories as well as food-rooms? Why not communal pansensors to save the energy of billions of private sets? Because the buildings had fixed the pattern in primeval times. Man in his regression to the ancestral protoplasm had been shaped and set by his own numbers like cells in a tumor, unable even to devolve further.

The guide was displaying the perfected fittings, in a tone of pitying instruction: the bed for sleep, begetting, and the fading echoes of begetting; the extensible small double bed; the body-waste outlet to the redistribution tanks. "And this is the Panel of Beauty. Every Life must have Beauty. These Sacred Symbols give it meaning, the Bee, the Ant."

Later, in the Hierarch school, he had been fascinated to learn what bees and ants really were. Extinct now, to a Freeman they were mere symbols, uncomprehended and so doubly sacred—the triple-figure-8, the lobed wedge. Difference was allowed between these panels, though all panels sprawled in the same slovenly incoherence. All rang changes on hive-symbols, male-female symbols, pregnancy symbols, family-unit symbols, Little Cycles within the Great Cycle, All-in-one symbols, perverted relics of the dregs of mind and vision.

Not the panel, but another detail that probably no Freeman ever noticed, a tiny, barred jib-sail of sunlight on the east wall, triggered memory. His heart flicked sharply:

He was twelve. He was visiting one of the three girls he had begun to call on at eleven. (At thirteen he would narrow it down to one; at fourteen—well, he knew that he would be a cheat like everything else.) He, she, her parents, and her year-younger brother were sitting at the pansensor, of course. The

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Drama was about how Love had always Been, even in old times; it stirred the anticipations of half a billion courting couples who ritually watched at that hour.

Yet his mind and eye wandered, and he saw that same wedge of sunlight overlapping the Panel. A queer vertigo seized him. He had treasured watching that curious, friendly light in his own family unit. Now he realized that it happened in every south-facing unit. Nothing, not even a patch of sun, was his own. He stood up. He said, under utter compulsion lest he perish, though he knew it was suicide, "Anyway, our panel *is different."*

*Girl and parents gaped, flabbergasted. Only the boy knew what he meant; and instantly, the vindictiveness harbored by all Pahad's companions, lashed out in triumph. The boy said very fast, as if by rote, "*Our *panel'sa* com*rade-panel'nevery level'fevery block'fevery City'na world, 'nit proves 'twe are* one *C'mun'ty.* Your *panel'sabout* Different *things, rocktships'na Brotherhood, 'n you wouldn' talk'bout't 'fyou weren' Different too. All'a kids know't.* You *can' marry'na nice family. They'll send* you *to'a Patrol."*

After that, things happened very fast. He was withdrawn from Projects. Strange people came to his unit, tuantoi, of whom he was terrified at first. His mother talked incessantly in a blubbering voice about how she knew *it would happen because he had always been* Different, *and his father too. His Dearli'lsister, whom he otherwise remembered only as another fixture in the unit and a continuous importunity in bed, stared fatty-face till they took her away to a neighbor unit. His father was impassive. But Pahad was examined and tested, and his fear of the tuantoi merged into a desperate reaching out to them. And at last they announced: He would be sent, not to the Patrol, the grim service-corps of hopeless misfits, sterile or sterilized and reconditioned powerfully, but to the Hierarch school.*

He tasted a furious elation, as of surf breaching a dyke. At last he had done something that had Consequences! Children and adults peered at him morbidly in feeding-room and corridor. His mother almost forgave him for the misery of having People Talk about her; she had been granted another child—not a reward for

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having a son elevated to the tuantoi, but because all her Fon'cresses had been In Vain, and now she would never Cry at His Wedding; conventional rapture filled her—she could boast to everyone that she was pregnant already; her youth would be renewed for twelve years, the one Difference that was Good. His father continued impassive. But Pahad, who had always walked alone, in secret, now walked alone in defiance before them all. His one panic fear was that they were only cheating him again, offering him freedom to snatch it away when he had touched it, and shut him back in his cell.

But the day came when a tuanto arrived to take him. His mother pawed him all over endlessly, sobbing—though he knew she was hysterically relieved to see the last of him. But in a snatched moment, as the tuanto, with great difficulty, was taking her thumb-print on a document, his father got him in the waste-recess by the door, knelt level with him, and whispered urgently, "Pahad, it does not matter about the panel." (This, with its symbol that might well have been a rocket-ship rather than an idealized phallus, had been replaced, on his mother's frantic demands.) "We Konors have had it since they built us into the Cities. But it has done its work now, and I am happy. Take this. Remember." He thrust into the boy's blouse a small, strange box. This later proved to contain an exquisite model of what Pahad supposed was a legendary space-rocket. The man's face wore an expression Pahad had never seen on a human face before—a joyful outlooking.

The model stood on Pahad's pansensor now, in the semi-oblivion of familiarity. By what long stratagems it and the panel had survived, he would never know. He only knew that he was the fulfilment of a dynasty more enduring than any great family of the Atlanteans.

His father added, since time still allowed, "Out there, you will be able to keep clear of females. It is through them that the Race gets its hold on you."

That last had helped him when the craving was strong on him for Ruara.

. . . How long had he been standing here? The female he was with now had, seemingly, ended her endless prying and ex-

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claiming, and was graciously ready to leave. The gaunt-faced kneeling memory (as it might be in that very alcove) faded, and Pahad came willingly enough.

As they moved towards the stairway, the years since that valedictory flitted swiftly to join up with the present: He hugged the bliss of lying in his own cubicle, breathing the perfume of solitude, deep, deep. He reviewed the tuantoi children, marvellous, unexpected each one—but most unbelievable of all, the youth who had *chosen* to go to a Freeman City, and had gone. (Why hadn't Ruara done that? Her aggressive meekness would have been beautifully at home in a City; but then, in brooding over Freemen, she would have been brooding only over herself.) He recalled sweetly the huge, slaking draughts of *knowing*, from wafers, even books, from teachers who were not the Face, gulped into ravenous depths of his being; it all seemed pretty thin now, but then it had been red meat. He had done and made endless fascinating, useless things. Above all, he relived the release, so incredible he had to keep touching it to reassure himself, from the Cycles, the Realities, the endless fondling physical and mental, the Plasm. And at last he came to the Old University in April, the elfin comradeship that paid for all the past. His heart lilted up like a bubble to sunlight.

CHAPTER 5

DEATH OF A CELL

A strange, rude sound broke the seemly hush of the halls—feet running. A Freeman in a white coverall darted past the opening of a cross-corridor. The guide roused to near-vivacity. "Some'n's happnun'," she exclaimed almost eagerly, falling from rote tuantoi-phrases to the mumbled slur Pahad had almost forgotten as the normal Freeman speech. She turned compulsively and

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followed the runner. Her two charges went along perforce, not without an infection from her curiosity, though Pahad knew what was occurring, and a reflex shudder ran through him: white was the color of waste, of doctors, of death!

Nada, of course, was ignorant of the symbolism. Even when he explained, she demanded, "But how do you know someone is *dying*?"

"A doctor would never come to a resident corridor foı less. Otherwise, you go to their corridor where they have the sick- and dying-cubicles and the Reclamation Plant at the end."

He pictured a grandparent Going. This was awesome because the Little Cycles were disturbed. Daily, at stated hours chosen so as not to miss the most important Shows, but breaking tradition nevertheless, the assembled family trooped to the dying-cubicle. There they went through a ceremony more vacuous even than home routine. The fading minds were fed a catalogue of pregnancies. (His mother, "Mar-lihn Gutch havin' her second.", "Tha's nice.", "Eight-seven days t'go.", "Tha's nice." Then, in strict precedence, his mother's brother: "Goff Josn an's wife havin' their first . . ." Then his mother's brother's wife; then his father.) Then a statement as to how near ripe the monthly crop now was. Then a report on what new phrases each of the four grandchildren had last learned. ("Pa'ad lernt'a Hug-me-tight song, dincha lover?") The details did not vary from day to day, but Grammuh seemed to draw great comfort from this litany. No need to report on the Games or the Dramas; even to their last gasp the dying oldsters were abreast of those. A final, long, uncomfortable silence was ended by the ritual phrase, "Well, I guess we better be goin' now," pronounced by Grammuh's senior child.

Pahad had been fascinated and shocked to see the bedridden forms lying alone. Presently he discovered that perhaps it was exciting too. Perhaps Going would lead to something even more exciting. Perhaps it was a lie, like all the rest, that Reclamation turned you all back into wheat and other people. (If other people were in him, *it sure didn't do* them *much good that he could see.) He cherished a notion that the Plant got nothing but dead meat while he, Pahad, would somehow escape and*

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live—not *as part of the Plasm. He was he! He would go away, free!*

But he had not witnessed the last rites . . .

The population of the corridor, just back from Assembly, were grouped at their doors; the nearest neighbors were so agog with primordial curiosity, they had even suspended the Cycles, and clustered around an open door, uneasy, bursting with an atavistic urge to chatter, but without words for this situation so exciting that it sanctified even breaking habits. All were in shorts and the women in halters. They made way for the woman-guide and the tuantoi, less from respect than from repugnance, a pitying dread of Brains.

The door stood open, because nobody had had any familiar cue to shut it. On the main bed lay the Person-going-away, the female of the unit, not a very old one. She was moaning, "Awww, it hurts. Awwwww . . . it hurts."

The male, his face disordered but otherwise vacuous, leaned over her from the far side: "I been yr'everythin', May-vel? Y'shared m'Fond Embrace th'rall 'tem'ty?"

"Yeh. Yehhh. I couldn'eat 'thouty', baby. Awwwwww!"

"Y'had'a Real Things'n Life?"

"AWWWWWW. Lemme go."

"Say it, May-vel. Say't,'na—'a man, can sen'yadowna dream-lan'trail."

"Uh! UH! Yeh. What morec'da girl ast outa life? Uh! Walkin'th'on'y boyinna worl' . . . two curly heads . . . *fun*." (Her eyes rolled like marbles in farewell to the still-capering, braying pansensor.) "AWWWW . . . AWWWWW."

The man stepped back, profoundly satisfied that ordainments had been fulfilled. Pahad had heard of a traditional Last Fondumb-race; but either that was a mere figure of speech, or ritual could be shortened in the name of a pity otherwise obsolete.

The white coverall stepped from shadow, bent, something flashed in his hand.

Nada turned a stunned face to Pahad: "Is that a hypodermic? Is . . . is he *killing* her?" Then, as he nodded: "But *she* needn't die. She could be saved. I *know*!"

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He wondered briefly how she knew, but replied, "Saved? For what?"

As if in reply (though no Freeman would have been listening to the unintelligible gibberish of tuantoi), some daring soul composed a speech: "Aw'sn't mean! She just been forgetn' smiles'ntears when'r girl-baby wenna her own nestobliss. She'n Ja-ho was goin' down'a suns't trail han'inhan, jus' lika mel'dy."

The remark loosed a flurry of others, halting phrases twisted from the cultural pool of immortal song or household formulas: "Smiled thr'r tears tilla weddin'bells was dumb.", " 'Snot *nice.* Sh'da gonna doc soon'r.'S*diff*runt. 'Sawful." " 'S'*him* 'sawfulf'r, watchin'a Games'n'Shows down'a years 'lone'th mem'ries." A child's mind responded to a familiar syllable: "Mo-ther, we mussn' miss'a end'fagame, mo-ther." Pahad had often wondered how much a standard Freeman understood of phrases repeated from the Sacred Songs; many of the remarks were quite appropriate, but then, a howl or a sniffle would have been as good.

The group began to break up, shamefaced as if from a legal but still disgraceful orgy, back to neglected Realities. But Pahad stood, mesmerized by the dying May-vel's face. As pain ebbed under the drug, something queer emerged, a look of bewilderment and fright. She seemed trying to say something through the double fog of anesthetic and degraded speech. But the fog closed in. Only, for a flash, the look became one of utter human longing and appeal. Then nothingness wiped the face blank as normal . . . The Great Cycle was ended.

Nada was tugging at his sleeve, more than ready to go. On the way to the stairs, she whispered, shakily, "But w-why, *why* couldn't she be saved? It's a *per*fectly common thing and easy to cure, at least at the start."

"Plenty of reasons." He took a harsh, ungracious pleasure in repaying the discomfort she had inflicted on him by forcing him here: "She'd be terrified of the doctor till she was too far gone to help. Then, you heard them say—if you could understand them—she'd just married off a child. If she'd had to postpone *that* for treatment, she'd have been disgraced. And do you fancy that doctor could do anything? He's learned a routine for the fifteen or twenty commonest troubles, and we supply narcotics

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and antibiotics. Even that much makes him such a Brain that he's almost as much an outcast as a Patroller. Incidentally, the Patrol looks after accidents."

"Accidents! With everything—uh, perfected the way it is?"

"You'd think it was impossible, wouldn't you? But you don't know Freemen."

"What about—obstetrics? Surely *that's* important and—respectable?"

He laughed shortly: "Sacred. Every female wallows in it from the time she can say Mamma—earlier for all I know." Then, as she shivered reminiscently at the scene they had witnessed, "Don't be silly. Dying young is *good*. What's left to live for? You're past everything that *matters*—Love, Procreation, Normal Family, Duty to the Community. A few years going downhill and getting a grab or so at the grandchildren is supposed to be a luxury, but it's pretty dreary."

"But—how old was—*she*?"

"She'd marry at fourteen, or less. If that was her second child, she'd have it before sixteen. It would marry at fourteen. So she'd be thirty, give or take six months." To Nada's look of sick incredulity, he smiled grimly. Two years younger than himself, maybe two older than Nada. And *they* hadn't even one child between them. Poor wretches of tuantoi! Dragging through all those years without *any*thing Real! Not that most of the Hierarchy were quite so abnormal.

He continued as they mounted the stairs: "The Ideal won't be attained till *normal* life is about thirty, till they can make confident allowance for Dad and Mom passing out right after Baby-girl's wedding, so they can make it part of the Cycles instead of an unreliable interruption."

"But—Pahad! That would be—horrible! Knowing, coldbloodedly."

"Oh no. It would be *nice*. Take all the worry out of it. Why, even now they feel miserable if they live past forty; they're using up food, and space, and contraceptives, and they aren't Living. They loathe themselves because they feel they're loathsome—which they usually are. And yet they cling to it. If they knew they were all set to end at a given time—no worry, no

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fuss. They'd literally wish themselves to death, like a good many do now. Besides, it means progress."

"Progress!"

"Certainly. Average life is about thirty-nine now. Bring it down to thirty, and eliminate all those useless mouths, and ten to fifteen billion more Lives could be lived in a generation, with all the Realities. After that, they could lower the fertile age down to twelve, or ten, by natural selection for the superior life-living types. We'll have a world-population of a hundred billion living, loving soul-mates eventually. Isn't that progress?"

"But *we* live to our nineties. And I've heard it said that we *could* live even longer if we had better conditions. And we're still the same *race*; we can—interbreed with them, can't we?"

"Yes, but *they* reject even our conditions; afraid of them, don't want their Living interfered with. Besides, what can anybody possibly *do* with ninety years? So all the vulnerable genes are fostered in the Cities, and that girl was an ideal type, like the insects that lay their eggs and die."

She grimaced and said, not to him, "That's it! Insects. Insects that can still talk a little."

"And with tools," he supplemented, "and panels. And tuantoi."

She shook her head forlornly: "Soon they'll absorb even us—like the University."

In the passionate ordeal of the past hour, he had forgotten his mission. Now it fell into place with stunning logic: not defense, offense! not merely fending off attacks on the University, but winning back the sister Universities, Ulm and Waikiki, to bring the blood of life slowly back to the ossifying Race, to show that the Great Realities thwarted even themselves if they existed for themselves alone. So, at last, he would reconcile his rebellion with his terrible drive to serve the Race! He would achieve it all if he won his war now.

Of the maybe fifty Freemen who had plied their crafts in the simple job of placing the motor, one had displayed a morbid, almost perverted curiosity; he had discovered the source of trouble. He explained in an almost unintelligible jargon: a tiny bit of something had been choking the atomizer-blast. Pahad

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was remotely intrigued; according to his random knowledge of skeets, the thing was impossible. But it *had* happened. So. . . . But he kept quiet, lest the man be marked down for scrutiny. Such a recessive type (Back-goer, they called it), was liable to end in the Patrol.

And as he gazed back at the receding City, he thanked that random mishap. Through it, he had escaped his past a second time; this time, the past within him. And he had focussed a sublime future.

Nada interrupted: "Pahad, aren't the Brotherhoods the same as the Patrol?"

He explained patiently: "No. The Patrol is for misfits—steriles and aggressives and so on—who can't qualify for the Hierarchy; they live in Cities called Camps, and they're reconditioned to attend to trouble—like a broken dyke or an injured Freeman; puts 'em to good use. The Brotherhoods—they're quarantined on Reserves at Chimborazo and Kilimanjaro; they operate rockets to bring minerals from other planets; and they're completely shut off."

"I *thought* you'd know. It's interesting, how many groups *do* survive, really."

"They don't add up to a tenth of one percent, including the Hierarchy. Only the community matters, and we mean what it means."

"Yes, but those special groups seem so much *more*, somehow." Then she flitted again: "Do you never go back to see your parents?"

Reference to his past was considered discourteous among Hierarchs, but with Nada he didn't care. "It isn't allowed," he said stonily, "and it wouldn't work. I was replaced by another child. I've been transformed into a monstrosity. I know from cases witnessed, that they wouldn't even remember me."

"Not even your father?" said Nada.

He looked sharply at her. He had been thinking so much about his father, he might also have spoken. But he rather thought not, and the remark seemed weirdly close to telepathy. Probably pure random coincidence, he decided, and said, "He might have. But he's almost certainly gone now."

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"It seems sad. He'd have liked to know how far you've come and may go yet."

"No sadder than watching a pansensor for ten years after I'd married and he'd lost all other reason for living. At least, he knew I escaped. He may have had ways of knowing more, at that. He was a strange man."

She let him fall into his prevailing brown study again. He hoped poignantly that Mahal Konor *had* known—maybe did know, maybe moved in spirit among quiet of trees, in Pahad's own sanctuary, sharing in his son's good life.

Nada broke in again: "One wishes there were something one could *do* for them!"

Blight Nada! Taking a wide and mighty vision such as he had just grasped, and shrinking it to a soulful, Ruara-like yearning to meddle. "Such as what?" he demanded caustically.

"Oh . . . like showing them *other* things," she ventured with gratifying vagueness.

"How could you, without threatening their Rights?"

"Well, coax them to come out and see—all this." She waved a hand around the sunny landscape, the fleets of white cloud, the East-Coast mountains approaching. "All there is to live in, and do things with, instead of—stewing in your own juice."

He laughed scornfully: "They'd as soon witness an abdominal operation—sooner."

"Well—I suppose you know." But her following silence was sulky.

They were flying so low that he could see catspaws of breeze spilling over the sea of grain. A fierce wish mastered him: If only that *were* a real sea, a marching tumult to crumble the Cities like wet sugar. He pictured the stunned exodus to high ground where, after the end of the world, stark necessity would winnow surviving humans from among the talking insects. Why not *let* it come?

Blight Nada! She left you all confused as to just where you did stand. Well, none of this Freeman-cuddling, that was for sure. But the twist fixed in his fiber, from the beginning, recoiled. To destroy Life, to deny Life . . . !

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Besides, universal ruin would carry down his own enchanted sanctuary. To save that, he must save all.

But still, Nada's girlish gushings had nothing to do with his own splendid venture.

Then she put in again, pestering: "I wonder what your father pictured you doing?"

"He wouldn't care, as long as I was free. Where I go, he goes too."

She propped chin in hands, elbows on gunwale. "Yes," she replied broodingly, "but where *can* you go from here?"

Hah! She'd see, soon enough.

CHAPTER 6

"CHANCE" SAYS THE FOOL

Three evenings later, he stood by starlight on the terrace of the Convention Resort, heartily bored. Why Nada had brought him here, he could not fathom. The convention was about an utterly unfamiliar mathematical specialty—one of those fields more like a game of moonshine than a serious pursuit. The 'interesting people' were interesting enough; he caught glimpses of other Avors, other Nadas; but he had tried in vain to make any contacts deeper than hard-shell courtesy. An uneasy feeling that he was an object of comment, was not really very entertaining either. Out of sheer, pent-up impatience, he would even have risked a little dalliance with Nada. She, however, remained sweet and sisterly.

He had passed some time exploring the nut-forest that covered the hills around. Nothing much happened, but he discovered little crags, too insignificant for rationalization, harboring all-but extinct grasses and flowering weeds; and on old outlawry quickened in the upland solitudes. Now, he was en-

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joying the crystal silence, with the companionship of great hill-shapes, indigo and silver-blue. For a moment, he hung outside all worlds he had known or imagined, with their meaning or lack of meaning—like a spirit about to be reincarnated in a world of its own choosing, and in no hurry about it.

His mood was broken by a foot-fall at the other end of the terrace; but he was mollified to find that the intruder was the House-host. Ironvi tua Hoaho, tall, white-haired, and marked by his peculiar choice of occupation as being pleasantly unconventional. In fact, after brief preliminaries, he showed an uncommon curiosity about the stars: "That misty scarf from north to south, that's the Flour-track, isn't it? Well now, where it goes behind that big, tilted mountain-top, there's a wedge of stars pointing down."

"Yes, that's the Prahu—like the sail of a Polynesian canoe, you know. The Atlanteans called it after some extinct bird, I believe."

"Very interesting, very interesting . . . You're a specialist on how the Earth moves and all that, aren't you, tuan? Well now, here's a curious thing. Never discussed it with anyone because I hate to look a fool, but you seem a nice fellow and you'd be just the man to know . . . When I was new here, I happened to notice how the bottom star of that wedge just grazed the high point of that mountain; looked like it was set glittering in the rock for a moment. I've watched it many times." He paused. Then: "Only it doesn't do that any more. It passes *behind* the top, and it's been doing so by a wider margin every year—especially in the past decade. Now, tuan, why would that be?"

Pahad had been listening as if to a child. Suddenly he heard the unfamiliar voice of observation speaking to him through the hypnotic chant of theory. He stiffened: "Are you *sure* of that, tua?"

"Well, tuan, on my wedding-night, I stood here and showed it to my wife, set in the rock like a jewel, sixty years ago. Watch it now."

Pahad stood motionless, confronting the implications of one simple fact. First: You could scare up half a dozen reasons why that star might *clear* the rock. But to pass *behind* it . . . He

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tried the obvious: "Trees or wild shrubs must be growing there."

"Tuan, it's as bald as the top of my head. Always has been."

"Some rocks have gotten shifted."

"I thought of that too. Took a skeet and examined the place. It's one mass of granite down to the roots of the hills. Not a loose chip."

Again the old, desperate conviction that there must be *some* commonplace reason . . . Only, this fitted so pat with that other problem which he had shelved for the last two days; the two strange creeping events matched so curiously with that acceleration over the past ten years and they were both so outrageously improbable. After months of archives, this was *fact*. It compelled . .

He excused himself abruptly, hastened inside, and found Nada in the main common-room. She was with a group watching a tuantoi-grade pansensor composition—a sequence of intricate, dissonant sounds and a harmonizing shift of jagged patterns on the screen. She came at once when he beckoned.

"Nada!" He omitted the title, enlisting her intimacy, "I've got to get home, at once."

"Wh-what? *Why?*"

"I've solved my problem."

She stared as if he had said something incredibly horrible. Dumb.

He drew her out to the terrace, which was deserted again, related what had happened, ending, "It's perfectly obvious. The polar caps *are* melting, because the axis of the Earth is shifting." He pointed out the star.

She sat down on the balustrade weakly: "But Pahad, tuan, surely you can't believe a—a fantastic thing like that just on the basis of some old man's amateur notes."

"We haven't explained something even more fantastic, but still a fact—the rise in sea-level, remember? This would *do* it."

"But what about the carbon dioxide?"

"I'm afraid I never was really convinced about that, Nada tuan—except when Avor thought there might be something in it," he said callously. "And this wipes it out entirely. This is *it*."

"I still think dioxide's the answer." But she herself sounded

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more dogged than convinced. "Besides, wouldn't the astronomers have noticed anything like an axis-shift long ago?"

"I'm not so sure." He slowly convinced himself: "Like the rest of us, each one of them has some tiny specialty; but no-one ever integrates the whole picture. That's been done long ago for all time. None of the big tua-tootles is a *star*-gazer. Routine readings are made by a few subordinates in the observatories at Chimborazo and Kilimanjaro. So . . . some young tua finds a discrepancy in the readings, knows it's impossible, figures it'll be blamed on him, and makes adjustments. That could go on for a long, long time in this world of specialized ignorance."

"Well . . . !" She sat as if completely thunderstruck, then gave herself a little shake and said more briskly, "And are you going to the Observatories to tell them *that*—or to Goahu?"

"Ho! A sympathetic hearing I'd get, I *don't* think. I've got to assemble so much data that they can't pigeonhole it. Of course, if it's true, it can't be hidden much longer. But *I* want the credit!" ("And" he added silently, "*I'm* going to lead the fight to save the Race. *And* the University.")

"Well, I hope you get it, Pahad. But we can't leave now, I'm sorry. I present my paper tomorrow late, you know."

He hadn't known, somehow, or even that she was giving a paper. But her skeet was the only convenient transport home. He chafed. Balked at every step! A rat in a maze, and the great watching eyes shut off the outlet every time you got near it. Your only progress was when you did something too unexpected for them to foresee—like just now.

He regretted having confided even in Nada, and watched her depart for her maiden quarters with no emotion but distrust. Somehow this delay might allow his enemies, Ruara, Dapper Dan, and the shadowy Council behind them, to discover that he had outflanked them, while he struggled against petty obstacles.

Not a rat. An unborn thing straining against impalpable threads that yielded when you thrust, and snapped back again.

Still, grimly, he killed the next day by a personal and therefore most unhierarchical, inspection of the star-eclipsing crest. It, and the opposing ridge on which the Resort was built, were

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fixed from eternity; any perceptible shift in either was as unthinkable as—well, as anything else. He gained only some mind-restoring hours in the high sun and wind.

On the trip home, he was surly. At the hangar, he thanked Nada formally. The episode had been, frankly, thoroughly dull. The revelation had been quite irrelevant and no credit to her at all. Indeed, she'd tried to kill it in favor of her own silly theory.

He strode off directly to the Archives, with new resolve in his step. "Father, the one thing you wanted was hope. We've got it!"

Yet, by the end of a pentad, he found himself in the same endless, smothering embrace of the gossamer threads, in the same reading-room with shadowy rafters in its high vault, at the same table, with Dan slinking about in his old smirk. He was in the position of a man standing before a mountain of grain naked, with nothing but his bare hands to carry it away. How did you *prove* that the axis of the Earth had shifted? How did you even go about investigating it without exposing yourself to ridicule or probable psychiatric attention, or to the flagrant piracy that was a stock-in-trade of the higher ranks—and doubly likely now? If he even had some theory good enough to command respect . . . but he found it more impossible to go on from convincing fact than from his previous misguided notions. Stalemate!

Sitting disconsolate in his cubicle at the Archives, he viewed that cynical thought with the masochistic relish of the cynic. The dioxide theory, he might have whipped up into something plausible in a year or less, with the collaboration of Avor . . . Realization jolted him: So immersed had he been in his new prospect, that he had never even contacted the old boy since his return. Nice, to encounter him in refectory or about the grounds, and be justly accused by that caustic tongue of not even calling for requested material!

Then, as often happens when the mind is already shaken, a plan swam together, clicked, and stood solid. Why not! Why *not* fudge the CO_2 data into something plausible, reap all the credit, promotion, added authority, gain time? Never mind if it were nonsense. Like all the dingy authorities he had been con-

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sulting, he had his own system of double-talk to ensure that no-one should discover how simple things really were. Let the Tuantoi-tan hurl *them*selves vainly against bristling squares of *his* technical jargon and formulas! The finikin scruples that had repelled him from just such a course, when Nada suggested it at their luncheon date (long ago), seemed burned out of him by the growing anger of his struggle, crushed by looming reality.

He swung his chair aside and, without even a visor-call, for the residence-block sacred to tuantatha-emeriti. By the time he was mounting the stairs, he was whistling lightheartedly.

The door to Avor's unit was open on the landing, and an unnatural bustle spilled in and out. He walked in and stood disregarded till Avor's chief assistant, a portly mongoloid with a crew-cut, came over self-importantly, and received his inquiries. "Ah," said the man somberly, "I see, tuan, you must have been absent and have not heard the news! Alas, our honored Chief was found dead six days ago. Most unexpected; cerebral hemorrhage; he should have lived another twenty years, to all appearances."

Pahad, with a dour foresight, expressed regrets that were more than formal, and asked about dioxide charts. Avor's papers were already sorted for filing or burning, and an obliging search revealed nothing relevant to Pahad's project. Evidently the old man had not so much as begun work on it. Strangely, even his Memorial Legacy turned out to be a very old work on some quite remote topic.

Pahad departed more than cast down. He had a moment of helpless panic and confusion; rat-in-a-maze, he had chanced to look up and see a great, grinning blur behind the goad that harassed him. He dashed about mentally, seeking some way to recover the lost information that had offered such a sudden hope. Then another emotion surprised him, an emotion he had experienced only once before, twenty years back when he parted from his father: not regret at a lost opportunity, but human grief for a human contact, for the first personality that had opened heartily to him in all his ingrown career . . .

Rapid footsteps interrupted this elegy, overtaking him, and a gaunt youth whom he had noticed in Avor's unit, came up be-

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side him, panting: "Tuan, may I speak with you privately for a moment?"

"I think we're more private here than most places."

"Well then, tuan, there's something I think I should tell you . . . I'm the one who was working on that project you were asking about just now."

"Oh? . . . Then it *was* being attended to?"

"Oh, yes. In fact, it was just about done. Quite a job! A chart for a region is simple; but when you correlate them over all the centuries records have been kept, and begin making allowances for marine and inland conditions, mountain barriers, geology forests, crop-types, and so on, it gets intricate. But I'd gotten everything sorted out and took my rough draft to Avor tuan-tatha seven nights ago."

"The night before he died, that was?"

"Exactly! He was very complimentary, promised to put me up for my tuaship. And I left all that stuff, his files and my stacks of calculations and maps, on his work-table. He said he'd look it over next morning. Well . . . next morning I came around with a wafer I'd overlooked . . . and found he had died in the night. But the material wasn't there, tuan. And it never turned up, there or at the archives, a whole armload of it."

Pahad kept his tone casual: "Who might have wanted it?"

"Nobody at all, tuan. And I'm sure I'd know."

"Well then, who, beside Avor and you, *knew* about the project?"

"Just about anybody. He'd talked about it everywhere, about how you'd called him in on a hush-hush project. You know how he was."

"But see here, if that material's gone, he'll have no Memorial Legacy."

The youth looked blank: "His Memorial Legacy was about the effect of inert gases on mutations. That's been filed."

Pahad thanked him, bound him to secrecy, and walked on into a blazing light of realization: The Tuantoi-tan, or Ruara which was the same thing, would go to *any* lengths to frustrate him. Rifling the property of a dead man! Yes, and knowing the exact moment when to do it! Would they stick at murder? Yet

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—at least, they were afraid of him. And by the Name of the Race, they'd better be! But . . . why had Avor lied about his Legacy? Or had Pahad just misunderstood?

And at least he had gained one advantage accidentally. His impetuosity had led him to let people know about the false lead; so now they'd suppose him confused and baffled. The secret of the real clue he had shared only with a girl bound to him by strong self-interest.

On the other hand—a sudden, unfamiliar feeling welled up through his weighing of gains and losses: the old man had left a spiritual gap in proportion to his massive body. Here, for the first time in Pahad's dilettante University life, had been a warmth, an affinity. He had neglected it; now that it was gone he realized it.

He channeled his regret and chagrin into a hardening anger at the swaddling, and now strangling cocoon of the Hierarchy.

He forged ahead relentlessly. At least, now he was working in a field where he knew the jargon—precessions and perturbations, time-lags and clandestine gravitational pulls. He went through the material swiftly, and thoroughly.

Only a few days later, he called in Dapper Dan, enjoying the luxury of finding that sleek efficiency at fault. "I thought," said Pahad, "I told you to bring me everything available on terrestrial motion."

"I believed I had done so, tuan."

Pahad, however, had again outraged convention by combing through the index-files himself. He relished confronting his adversary with the loot: "You did? Then what's all this?" He passed over a list of memoranda.

"Well," Dan scrutinized them negligently. His tone was discreetly patronizing, "so much of it is duplicate, you know, tuan. We assume you don't want sources already summarized in official syntheses. Our job is to save you effort."

"Your job is to bring what I ask for. And here's this and this and I don't know how many more, with *no* synthesis notation. Bring it *all* up. And get busy on the cross-referencing."

With an unspoken all-right-brother-you-asked-for-it, the dap-

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per one fetched a trolley-load of odds and ends—stacks of incredibly pointless voice-wafers by abysmal unknowns, drums and spools of ancient recordings. At the back of the trolley he had added a row of books from the Atlantean 'library' that formed the historic core of the Archives, books that looked ready to crumble like dried mud; *that* was carrying out the letter of instructions so literally as to caricature them.

Pahad looked at the stuff and futility submerged him. This was the bottom of the barrel! Not even honest dust; trash! It wasn't *time* he needed; he faced four years with no place to go, as helpless as a man on a frictionless table. Grimacing, he selected the books first; their print he could not read, but at least the quaint, crude diagrams amused him in his frustration, photogravures of vanished buildings, colored maps of Atlantean national territories . . .

Here was something really quaint, though! Apparently one of those fictitious tales the Atlanteans had relished, lacking pansensors. The illustrations intrigued him—not even photogravure but drawings, black-and-white, grotesquely stylized yet lively: bearded men, tropical forests, and some primitive but gigantic engineering project. It ended, in the last picture, with a vast explosion. The attached voice-wafer, itself antique, said: "Title: Barbeekahn and Ko, (a man's name and a term indicating a business-association). Author: Zhyhl Vehrn, writing in the mid-Steam Era, in the Indo-European language Frohnseh. Classification: a fanciful tale based on contemporary science, forecasting future progress, at which this author was notably successful.

"The prophecy of this book, however, was not fulfilled. A group of men acquire property-title to the polar regions and attempt to rectify the Earth's axis, so that melting of the ice-caps will free their 'property' and its mineral wealth. They build a huge cannon, dug into a mountain, whose recoil should rotate the globe. They fail owing to an error of three decimal places due to an accident; a recoil a thousand times greater would have been required. Fallacies . . ."

Dan appeared deftly at Pahad's ring, and said sweetly, "Find something?"

"Yes. Put this through the semantograph for me, tua."

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"Oh, but the book would hardly stand that. Besides . . ."

One had to risk alerting Dan to the fact that the matter was of unusual interest: "If I have to apply for authorization from Goahu tuantatha, I'll add a memorandum on your systematic insolence. Get busy!" He relished smacking Dan down; it had flavor!

Yet a playing through of the whole translation, in his apartment that evening, suggested nothing more. Men *had*, if only in airy fiction, conceived the idea of tampering with the axis of their native globe. But what natural force, even, could supply recoil adequate for such a prodigy? His mind swiftly calculated the billions of tons, hurled away at explosive velocities needed to start a swing that one could perceive even after centuries—much less a swing that accelerated.

The thing struggling to be born in his mind, a self that would be freed by solution of his problem, sensed daylight beyond a last thread of its cocoon. But that thread stretched as far as his force could strain—and snapped back. "If I can solve this conundrum, I'm free . . . I have all the pieces . . . Yes, but a Dark-ages blacksmith might have all the pieces to a skeet engine . . . Nonsense! My mind's supersaturated; one word could crystallize it . . . Maybe sleep on it . . . No!"

With feverish clarity he recognized that his brain held all the factors in delicate balance, a one-in-a-million opportunity. One touch, and they could fall into place; one touch and they could tumble into a confusion that might defy systematic efforts for years, while his enemies triumphed and catastrophe engulfed them all. Balancing his thoughts like a house of cards, he snatched a few full-ration biscuits; he paced. To have had such incredible luck, and to fail it!

"Relax, you fool. Creep up on it . . . or let it creep up on you."

He took some polta, a minor shot, and sank into his arm-chair.

Ultra-hypertension, rather than the polta, threw him into a doze, quiet, but not deep enough to sweep his brain clear . . . He emerged . . . His mind reassembled the world around the first object his eyes reported to it . . . And then he knew!

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Calmly, without even surprise. On his seldom-used pansensor stood the little rocket-model, his father's gift on that day of victory, so many lives ago. Of course! The rockets . . .

It all fitted, nothing more needed, nothing left over. But now —what to do about it? He mustn't let this triumphant impetus slacken. He swung to his feet. "Talk it over—with Nada. That'll make the next step clear."

He called her immediately. In a moment, a light flicked on in the screen—she must have left her visor open—and he had a devastating glimpse of total femininity running towards him, expanding into a close-up of sleepy, pouting face and velvet neck and shoulders. But he was so drunk with his discovery, he merely noted that she must sleep naked, Polynesian style.

She spoke first, however, without evident embarrassment or annoyance: "Gracious, Pahad! What's the matter?"

"Nada," he reined his voice firmly, "the axis *is* shifting. And I know why."

Her face was a skipped heartbeat: "You *do*?"

"I do . . . Look, I'm sorry I waked you—didn't realize what time it was—but I wanted to talk this over while it's still red-hot."

"I know. But Pahad . . . should we discuss it over the air?"

That bit of common-sense, even from a woman, steadied him: "No."

She considered, biting her lip: "Look. Go down to the South Cloister. I'll meet you there in a few minutes."

She did. He had paced the fifty-yard cloister only twice when she appeared, as groomed and poised as at any luncheon.

Tersely he told her about the book and its story, ending: "It would have taken a thousand such cannon, you see. Of course that's just a romancer's guess; ten- or fifty-thousand might be nearer. But anyhow, we've got 'em, and we're using 'em."

He seemed fated to dumbfound her by each step in his progress. She simply stared.

"Look. What does a mining-rocket thrust against when it blasts off?"

"Why . . . the atmosphere, doesn't it?"

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(Small shame to her to be wrong about *that*. Rockets ranked with scatology as topics of conversation or knowledge. Rather, he should blush for his own lore. But, after all, they were scientists and she hadn't turned a hair.) "No, it brakes against atmosphere coming back, all right. But it's launched out of a tunnel —in a mountain! The recoil is taken up by the Earth. The stations at Chimborazo and Kilimanjaro are almost diametrically opposite, near the equator, and thrusts at those points would exert a torque if they just happened to be directed right. *Now* do you see?"

"I . . . suppose I do . . . But it seems so—so in*ad*equate! This is your own specialty, of course. But a rocket's such a *tiny* thing compared to Earth." Her gesture to the plain, vast beyond them in the star-shine, conjured up the colossal globe turning through eternity.

He smiled briefly: "Yes, but Earth moves in an almost perfect vacuum. No friction. Even the slightest thrust would start a swing that would continue forever, no matter how slowly. Even old Barbicane's cannon would have produced a noticeable effect by now. But the Brotherhoods send off scores of rockets yearly, and that's been going on for—well, hundreds of years. And now the cumulative effect is adding up."

The halter of her sarong rose and fell softly, two or three times. "But are you sure the tunnels are placed so that they'd produce this effect?"

"I'll stake my life on it."

"But . . . now the axis will go *on* tilting!"

He laughed out loud: "Hah! Don't you see? That's why my discovery's so great. It's not just something we can't do anything about. Man has caused the effect; man can reverse it. So I'll be Tuantoi-tan, and the University will be safe forever."

She murmured, ghostlike, "That's what really matters to you, isn't it? . . . Now, you want to discuss what to do about it?"

"Well . . . I did. But it's all perfectly clear now. I'll get a Collaboration Warrant from Goahu. I'll go to a Master Observatory. I'll observe the tunnels and insist on an instrument-check of the stars by ranking officials. That's all. They can't disregard *that*."

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She drew a convulsive breath: "You mean, you'll really go among those—those dreadful men?"

"Oh, the observatory staffs are tuantoi. I'll be safe."

"Are you going to tell Goahu *why* you're going?"

"And let him reap what I've sowed? Not I! He'll give me the Warrant just to get rid of me."

They fell silent. At last she sighed: "We'd better get some sleep. But let me know what's going on. It's the most exciting thing I've ever known." She didn't sound excited, though. She sounded downcast.

Pahad went home feeling the let-down of the intermission between acts. The gleam from his half-curtained panels welcomed him, but he was too drained of energy to greet it with the elation of a lover bringing a royal gift.

Letting himself in, he noticed that his desk-light was lit. Had he been using it that evening? Perhaps recollection of Karlohu's report there, long ago, alerted him . . . Something lay in the same place—a brown speech-wafer.

Its texture was strange to his fingers. It said:

> "Tuan, your excessive over-exertions are more than likely to bring on just such a fatal accident as befell the late Avor tuantatha. Be advised by those who wish you a brilliant future and would be sorry to witness such a tragedy. Be more circumspect."

He stood while time also paused. And the last piece of the puzzle fitted into place like a machined part: Who would threaten assassination? Not the Council, not even Ruara. But the Brotherhoods! Why should they threaten him? Because they thought he had penetrated a secret. In other words, the placing of the tunnels would not be a fantastic coincidence, but deliberate. The objective? Obviously, disruption of the Community and seizure of power. Ignorant and outlawed as the Brothers might be, they would not be ignorant of practical engineering or practical astronomy. True, they were under surveillance by the Observatories; but conversely, the Observatories were open to their tampering, and a few underlings corrupted

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could deceive the lazy tuantoi till too late. Their agents must be everywhere else, too. How had they known that he was close on their secret? Insight flashed: Dapper Dan would be *their* man, not Ruara's; he, and they, would fear what Pahad might guess from the old book. They would have the translation sooner than Pahad himself. Since then, they had monitored his every move and had seen his excited rendezvous with Nada.

Suddenly he confronted not merely the sluggish disapproval of the Council, not merely Ruara's petty, evangelistic spite, not some remote natural force, or human negligence. For all he loved, all he dreamed, for his very life, he faced naked, ruthless conspiracy.

He stood alone between Council and Brotherhood. But, stronger than despair was savage shame. The contempt of that note!

His efforts of the past half year had been very daring, on the tuantoi scale. But in the cynical glare of this threat, they shrivelled to the paper-grubbings of a timid little scholar—a man who could be knocked cowering into a corner by the mere wind of a violent gesture, while loud-mouthed aliens defiled his gods and violated his beloved.

Emotion died like the red heat from full-tempered steel. The metamorphosis, begun six months ago, was complete; the imago had stepped from the burst cocoon.

Something oddly soft gave way in his hand, and he glanced down to find that he had crushed the message-wafer to powder. He fluffed it contemptuously onto the table. Of course they would use perishable material, leaving no voice-graph, more betraying than finger-prints. A clever, well-organized underground!

But it *had* misjudged Pahad tuan Konor.

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CHAPTER 7

"WE": A. D. 3927

Adrenalin had driven sleep from his brain. His mind had gotten the second wind it had never needed before, the lean, gray endurance that can carry on till a fuse blows. He sat down and thought, no longer groping for inspiration, but laying his ideas out in logical sequence:

First: He alone could warn the world in time of what lay just ahead.

Second: It would be useless to publish his suspicions now. They would seem simply a frantic attempt to gain time. No-one would so much as read his report through.

Third: The most he could get out of the Tuantoi-tan would be an official Warrant from Goahu. Otherwise they would obstruct him as a noxious pest.

Fourth: Thus he would have to get conclusive proof single-handed.

Fifth: The only such proof would be adequate tests of his theory by the tuantoi at Kilimanjaro or Chimborazo, preferably the former as First Observatory.

Sixth: To reach Kilimanjaro, he would have to run the gauntlet of innumerable hands such as the one that had laid this threat on his table under the guise of friend or stewart. And a conspiracy that had murdered Avor, stolen his records, and threatened more murder, wouldn't let Pahad get even to the Ferry Skeet.

Seventh: Alone, as the saying went, between reaper and plough, with every door shut, he would have to *make* a door by some action so outrageous that no-one, Brother or Tuantoi-tan, could anticipate it—something as outrageous as his childhood attendance at unauthorized projects.

He knew immediately what that door would be. And blight step three! Of course, any visit to Goahu would be suicide, with

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Ruara sleekly looking on. No warrant, then. You needed no license to be an outlaw.

More had happened in the past twenty hours than in all the preceding twenty years since he had entered the Hierarchy. Good! He could hold that pace—and force it.

From that point, he behaved on the assumption that every gesture might be watched. His actions had to simulate cowed meekness, and at the same time achieve a swift, integrated plan.

He retired to his close-curtained bedroom, where he drafted and recorded duplicates of a report; hopeless as such an effort was at present, if he disappeared, that fact might give his claims sensational weight. He managed a doze, lay late abed thinking, and so got off to a conspicuously late and apathetic start. His first public action, towards noon, was to demonstrate abject surrender by lugging a load of materials back to the Archives. But, once relieved of this duty, he bided his chance to dodge down to the Legacy Vault unobserved, so far as he could determine. There he left one copy of his report in his private box, which could be opened only by the Chancellor after the box-holder's death or presumed death. And he emerged, still apparently unobserved, and set out for Nada's.

She wasn't home, nor at her laboratory when he visored there. He was annoyed: If she were so set on him, he felt irrationally, she might at least be there to bid him good-bye when he stood a very good chance of vanishing without trace. Then he laughed at himself and put the second report-wafer into her receptor-box, with a note:

> "If you haven't heard from me within two pentads, please assume that I am in trouble, and force the attached report on the attention of anyone in authority who, you believe, might take real action. I have reason to think this material is dangerous to possess. No-one but myself knows you have it, so keep it quiet till you are sure it will stir up enough furore at least to protect yourself. Good luck."

but he went home disconsolate. Nada suddenly appeared very comforting.

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Once home, he collected a small kit of necessities. Once packed, he stalled. Walking up a tower stairway is easy; but the step over the parapet at the top, though just as simple as the others, is somehow more difficult. A score of desperate actions lie always to everyone's hand—cutting one's throat, shooting an antipathy, driving over a cliff, marrying on impulse—but one rarely implements them. With a world-total of a million skeets, no-one had even dreamed of carrying out the equally simple act he proposed. He began to wonder if he himself would get past dreaming.

He prowled about the living-room, unable to compel himself to action. If only he had the most casual word of encouragement, if he weren't so utterly alone, so dependent on his own initiative . . . A wry thought struck him: *Let* him trigger himself, then. There was his neurreson. It would be like a child taking comfort from a toy the life of which had been bestowed by the child himself. Still . . .

The neurreson was a pansensor attachment, the last art-form devised by man before man's numbers had rationed even art. It employed plates, each of which was a tissue-culture of nerve cells organized into an engram, a cortical pattern, but held in suspended animation till required. When activated, each plate induced a powerful telepathic resonance, a sequence of dream-like, emotional experiences. It was, in fact, the keynote in the Freeman Assembly-orgy. But it could be used as a medium of great subtlety and nobility, and a few Hierarchs, including Pahad, cultivated it as such. He had neglected it during the past months; and now, looking through his plates, he was disappointed—they seemed foolish pipe-dreams which he had outgrown.

But when he came to the plate he had been subconsciously seeking, he knew it. It was not quite his own composition, but a revision of an obscure work that nobody else seemed to like or even know. He connected it and let it take hold of him as fluid revived the dehydrated tissue and the circuits of the pansensor threw the plate-pattern against his own brain-pulses . . .

Spaciousness; keen scent of North and the sea; fellowship with wonder; and peril welcomed as an old friend. Mountains,

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not the humbled ranges of his world but glittering peaks with savage names; foaming oars and castled headlands; combat that was more than grubby butchering; hardship that was more than misery to be survived. And at the end, a flame of death in exultation.

He emerged from the last echoes of that extrovert's heaven, smiling ironically. Yes, that was his dream; it swept his mind forwards like war-pipes, the voice of some unrealized self unheeded except in dreams. Yet, his flesh remained inert counseling common-sense: would that sort of thing really help you when you were a forlorn, tiny organism dying in some disastrous way, utterly alone? The two selves grappled, deadlocked.

A third, self-pandering voice counseled: Dinner-time; go to Refectory and get something to stick to your ribs, raise your blood-sugar . . . He rose and moved to the door, even as his new self, striving to be born, recognized the plausible trickery, and raged: "No, no! If you take this step, you'll take the next and the next . . . away from your resolve. You'll submit like all the rest, for peace in your time . . ." And still he moved on, opened the door, walked laggard towards the Refectory. Sea and north wind lost their grip, receded far, far away into the pansensor-dream.

The University was her least lovely self, a bride in curl-papers. Summer drought, cheated of rain that was channeled to the nut-forests, had not yet passed on to the copper-and-bronze of the Fall. His abiding love drooped. The grounds were deserted. He'd better hurry or he'd have to eat leavings. No . . . there went a group, leisurely . . .

Yet, as their paths converged, he knew by undefinable details that these were not University people. No, by the Race! *What* were they? They looked around, as if they were the sightseers who never came, taking notes into little, portable recorders, stopping to consult. Their kilt-and-tunic was the uniform of some unrecognized guild, tan and walnut. Ten yards away, he noted that the leader, in the middle of the huddled conference, was a woman. Somehow, the fact tripped his pulse. Then,

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as he passed the group, it broke up and moved towards him, and he saw—Ruara . . .

But he had never seen Ruara so full of a life—of sorts. Beneath the pom-poms of color tattooed on her cheeks, her usually palid skin was flushed. Under the conventional pencilling of eyebrows, her eyes darted about almost gaily. Her very walk was brisk. Then she saw him, and seemed to vibrate. A smile, spontaneous for once, twitched across her lavender mouth; her sidelong glance, tilt of chin, saunter of foot, sketched a perfect incarnation of taunting malice. Ruara would never taste any other emotion, only an insatiable lust to Belong and yet to Manage, to be Freeman and yet Great Mother; but malice she surely was relishing.

Pahad glimpsed a drawing-board propped against the haunch of one of her entourage, an ordnance map of the University, scored over in red. Somehow, Ruara had arranged to make a preliminary survey of the grounds, to estimate the loot that would convince the looters, to have plans ready for action the moment the axe should fall. No doubt, she'd have arranged to let him know; meeting him was a stroke of luck. Her voice drifted back with supreme and studied nonchalance, "Oh no, Choso tua, it would be silly to build Rational Units *here*. One more pylon at the Center . . ."

Pahad had heard of lions only as semi-myths, never of selling their skins before they were caught. But he didn't need metaphors. Unashamedly he stood glaring after the group. His first coherent thought was: "How I must have changed since I fancied that pair of yearning arms was a femme fatale, since I even found her a vicious drug!"

Then he realized that where his April love had grown anemic, a sound, healthy hate had filled his arteries with polta. Sold out in advance, was he? Well, by blight, he'd give her, or Them, a fight for it! He turned and raced back towards his home, his abandoned kit.

Even the impetus of anger could not entirely numb his flesh and spirit against shrinking from a high-dive into a chasm. But two contradictory thoughts carried him forwards: One, if he kept moving, he wouldn't stop; and two, he could always turn

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back. Thus, a quick meal of synthetics committed him to nothing—he often had one; latching his door behind him committed him to nothing; neither did striding out towards the hangar.

But, as he went, he drank avidly of this scene he might not see again. Commonplace details suddenly glowed with their real value: "Good-bye, the refectory entrance. Good-bye the weeping birch where I used to lie and watch the stars come out on Summer evenings. Good-bye, good-bye. You're worth dying for, if I die."

At the hangar, he waited on the ramp while the buxom girl-tu in charge taxied out his skeet. The sun was still two hours above the horizon; clouds were colored like Goahu's daffodil-orchids; the Control Tower was a pale yellow crystal needling the horizon; and the wheat was white for eighth-harvest.

But a night-vast loneliness shut out all the gold. Longing for a world of his own, he was alone between two worlds. Of two-hundred million fellow-beings within a quarter-hour's flight, only Nada would remember him long if he failed, or understand why he had gone. . . . Out in the wheat, an insect chirped doggedly, lonesomely. On ancient tapes, he had heard them chanting by millions. Like it, he had come down the centuries by a chain of genetic accidents. And now the chain might be running out . . .

Take-off still committed him to nothing. He could stop at the Tower and kill a few hours . . . The harvest plain blurred by below. He passed the Tower at a speed that would not excite comment. He still was not committed . . .

As the Gulf spilled wider along the horizon, he passed a small City. A chevron of robot harvesters was marching into the grain; as a child he had had notions of how grain *should* be cut, with song and triumph, not from a control-room. Well . . . at least he'd started this trip with song and triumph, however it ended.

The shore-line slid behind him, and the thirty-kilometer zone of shallows copper-green with food algae, and cut into panels by hoary causeways. Squat, ancient pumping-stations exhaled

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sewage and crushed minerals seawards, and inhaled torrents of nourishment.

Maximum speed was least conspicuous. If he had any business across the water, it should be urgent. A joy-ride was so abnormal, it was bound to result in interception and prying, exposing him to his enemies before he had even decided to act. He had to get launched on the incredible before anyone noticed that he was doing the unusual.

With the shore safely out of sight, he swung east towards Florida . . . An hour later, he curved into a service-ramp outside an Atlantic-coast City. As he snapped up the dome of the skeet, a chill, rank odor washed about him; not like the Gulf breezes, colder, more inhuman, dominating the flat smell of the algae-beds. Thalatta, thalatta! The sea! Listening, he could hear its timeless, hostile whisper along the breakwaters. And night was striding across it to meet him.

A Freeman attendant sauntered out, accepted ration-ribbon for enough fuel to fill all tanks to capacity, filled them—an enormous order—and slouched away without a word. What had there been to say? And that, thought Pahad, was his valedictory from the Race.

As he decompressed his buoyancy-tanks and soared into the upper light again, he knew, for one lambent instant, that this was the knife-edge of decision. Out yonder was the untamed, useless element where no man had ventured, outside the rare ferry-lanes, in twenty memories, the savage loneliness where storms walked, where the port was unknown, and no guidemark endured for two breaths . . . And now, chasing the sun, he could be home by dusk.

He laughed aloud, startling himself. Tuantoi-tan and Brotherhood had misjudged him. He had misjudged himself. He had never had any doubt. He was still the boy who had stood up and said, in the face of fifty billions, "*Our* Panel is different!"

He swung south, keeping inland till he should be clear of the City. Along the coast he could see extensive new dykes where the indolent engineering of the Community was still keeping pace with the uncomprehended floods. A small glitter ahead announced a Marine Station, one of the thousand mouths by

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which the Race suckled from the sea the highest levy possible without depleting capital—straining and processing plankton directly without the waste of intermediate larger organisms. The few workers in this shift would be intent on winding up their two-hour toil lest they suffer delay in hastening back to their dearest programs. Still, some monitoring tu might notice the skeet, scarlet, silent, and tiny in the height, think it worth reporting, and send ripples of warning to spying ears. He swung east, leaving behind the whole feeding, breeding continent whose cell-units by billions were born anonymous, died anonymous, and merely functioned in between. He had escaped! For the first time in his life he was really alone. He was a name against the universe, with the weapons he could hold in his hands.

As the wrinkled sea spread beneath him, he had one qualm of fear: Could this delicate hull really bear him across the unknown? Then he remembered: She was April; he was not really alone while he had her. And his neurreson plate sang in memory: Men had staked their lives against the sea in ages past, in wooden shells spreading sheets of fabric to the wind, or in fliers that were no more than huge kites pulled by clumsy combustion-engines. Some man had been first with each. He too was first.

The coast vanished as the sun no longer silhouetted it. The sea vanished in violet Darkness below. The sky was a topless glimmer, the color of time. Ahead, to port and starboard, monstrous chasms of sea-cloud loomed from depth to stratosphere, powder-pink and powder-blue, and he held on straight into the heart of them. 'She' was beauty, and this was part of Her he had never suspected—viking girl. Watching, as the colors faded, he munched the tasteless skeet-rations—food now the peer of sea-biscuit, pemmican, dates and curdled camel-milk, any food of nomad man.

In the night, he was wakened from trusting sleep by a rocking and whistling, and sat up to see the skeet-dome spattered with wet, by the glare of lightning that snagged and split ahead and below. He took the controls that steadied her in the updraft, expanded the buoyancy-tanks and felt her rise gallantly to out-top the storm. With elation, he realized that he felt no fear, only a

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vast, defiant curiosity. Death? But what a heroic, flaming potion this storm would be to mix with that bitter brew! Back yonder, when you died, you 'gave your body back to the Race' another unit for the Reclamation Plant in the merciless book-keeping of global chemistry; the thought was supposed to be solemnly exalting. He felt a mad glee at the notion of eluding that repeating decimal. Even the Patrol couldn't find him out here. If he perished, his body would be whelmed in the careless power of the ocean, himself, perhaps, carried away in the freedom of storm and night.

But in a few minutes, he burst clear into the rarefied, star-peopled height. He found his academic but thorough knowledge of Atlantic storms good enough to help him chart a sufficiently safe course for the robot controls. And he snugged down again, tasting the new luxury of comfort in the jaws of danger.

He surprised the sun two hours early, as he curved around the globe to meet it over mid-ocean . . . He spent the day with the vastness and solitude that was all one sweep, impossible to rule off into kilometers and hours . . . He was the one traveller in the world. The lust for aimless motion that had devoured so great a bite out of Earth's dowry in Atlantean times, had long since given way to an equally aimless huddling with familiar stimuli in a familiar cell. Only luckless officials, and such, braved the emptiness of travel.

The emptiness filled him and he opened himself into it, newborn wings hardening, soaring.

And the skeet held on through it, a tiny, scarlet particle . . .

At mid-afternoon, he sighted the Guinea Coast, and swung southward, skirting it. After dark, he saw coastal lights ahead, and invaded Africa near the mouth of the Niger, well away from any City or Station . . .

Again the premature dawn. As he woke, his peace withdrew like the stars in the wakening sky. A tension mounted in him, a string being tuned. He had balked the specters of storm, mechanical failure, flaw in calculation. His incredible foray had been almost disappointing, no more than a gigantic stroll for gigantic meditation. Now, ahead, lay a closer-woven menace,

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one that would never let him slip through by chance, that would surely, unfailingly challenge him with all its might and craft: the threat of arrogant, remorseless, human evil marshalled against him.

Africa below might have been any place on Earth. Cities were indistinguishable from those of America and spaced with the same checker-board regularity; crop, forest, power-dam gave an illusion that he had never crossed the ocean at all.

But the hum of the tautened string rose ever more shrilly. And his mind twanged at concert-pitch when he recognized his goal ahead of him, untamed Kilimanjaro with high noon over it, a multi-billion-ton presence of rock, vegetation, and snow. The silver-gray buildings of the Observatory, near the summit, were no yoke on it but an emblem, a hill-fortress of gods from the ages of myth. Beyond it, he knew, towards the Indian Ocean, lay the forbidden, palisaded Reservation of the Brotherhoods, the menace he had come to unmask single-handed.

His speaker suddenly croaked into impersonal life, with demands for identification. He gave it, but refused to add more than that he came on urgent, confidential business from the Tuantoi-tan. They accepted that. He was monitored in with blank efficiency, and touched down on a landing-field as unfamiliar as Mars could have been—strange architecture, confusing layout.

The attendant who trotted out to meet him, might himself have been from another planet—or another age. He was a wild-looking young fellow, his skin tinted by the sun like that of an ancient savage, and something that resembled a weapon of the violent eras, dangling from his belt. But his clothing was smart and functional, though for unknown functions; and he seemed amiable enough, his teeth flashing white against his coppery face as he flagged the skeet to its berth.

As Pahad set foot on a pavement of nameless, red substance, his head swam and he tottered slightly. Hard, live fingers gripped his elbow and a good-humored voice said, "Take it easy, tuan; almost four miles altitude, you know." Pahad warmed and immediately chilled again with a knowledge that no-one here could be trusted.

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CHAPTER 8

THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

Through his mind, dimmed with sudden fatigue, those reactions still alternated as he was passed on to the driver of a ground-vehicle that took him to the main buildings, to a tuagrade official, and others in confused succession. The faces were pleasant, but he couldn't judge whether the cordiality were casual or fulsome. A score of conspirators could have picked up his declaration of urgent, confidential business, and drawn obvious conclusions. All this unusual courtesy might well be intended to lull him till he could be dealt with adequately.

Somewhere, he was told that the man who would have to consider his confidential mission was, at the moment, buried in the final check-up for the departure of a mining-ship. It sounded like a stall. But there wasn't anything Pahad could do about it. And whatever happened, he could cope with nothing till he had slept. His inaction, even his prolonged dozes on board the skeet had not been rests; the whole thing had been a titanic feat for a man whose maximum normal exertion was walking a quarter-mile to and from the hangar, or a brief swim or gymnasium work-out.

So he submitted half willingly while another swarthy, competent young man, with a round, cat-like face, conducted him to a little guest-room, pressurized to sea-level, and brought him some peculiar food. Pahad was ravenous and the food captivating, but even as he ate, the couch exerted a magnetic pull of several megagaus.

Still, his attendant was so amiable and friendly that silence would have been boorish. With a smeared idea of showing personal interest and at the same time curtailing the interval till sleep, Pahad said, "You needn't wait, tuanto. Your wife'll be expecting you."

The lad grinned: "Sorry, tuan, I'm not tuantoi. I don't rank except in the fleet; I was Mr. Mate, outrigger's mate—worked

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on the helioceptors. They grounded me on account of my heart. I'm not married, either."

Pahad was pleased that, sleepy or not, he restrained himself from staring. A Brother! But the other remarks were equally startling: An able-bodied male, presumably well over twenty, making a statement like that casually, as if he'd said with a laugh that he expected to be dead before morning. "Not married!"

"Oh no, tuan. You see . . . maybe you didn't know, but in the Fleet a man or woman doesn't marry without having proved fitness to bring up children, to be a parent of the future."

Pahad didn't expect others to share his celibate tastes. Such people even made him uncomfortable. But *this* idea was dumbfounding—like saying you couldn't eat porridge till you could grow and prepare the grain by hand. Yet it stirred a kinship in him: Contrary to the Assembly invocation that drew life back through primal gropings to chaos, *these* people evoked for their children the power that had lifted even slime-jellies beyond feeding and breeding; the Freeman's god was their devil. It confused his blunted wits . . . he'd have to think it all out later . . . meanwhile he blundered on, "But if you're grounded, how do you prove fitness now?"

"Oh, lots of ways." The ex-mate cleared table with no sign of embarrassment and no further comment, and departed.

Pahad sank into the couch and into the depths of sleep almost simultaneously. But as he went under, thoughts writhed confusedly: "*Good* guys . . . dangerous . . . No! Conspiracy's all Tuantoi-tan . . . Be careful, don't trust . . . Children for the Future, good! . . . Marriage for the Future . . . You *win* women like Nada, not like two rabbits . . . So here I am . . ."

He woke to a noise as if the cork had been let out of a bottle of polta ten years old and a mile wide, not an explosion but a dull bunggg that plugged his ears and filled space solid all around him as he roused. It was followed by a hiss like Niagara plunging into a live volcano, but tapering swiftly to nothing. A lurid, jade-green light cut a motionless rectangle on the ceiling.

Thinking of the actual volcano beneath his feet, he heaved to the floor and tottered groggily to the window. A pre-dawn world

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of silver heights and grape-bloom depths was stabbed with a single spark of hot color that sank, as he stared, beyond vision into the sky. His mind, still smothered with fatigue, knew that he had just seen the end of a Miner's take-off—something that hardly one person in a million had witnessed even from afar. The metals and fissionables brought back by the Brotherhoods, were a vital link in Earth's economy; but they might as well have been brought by the stork that covered up for other unmentionable horrors in Atlantean times.

Gripping the windowsill, Pahad assembled data; though all the rest of his brain was doped with unfinished sleep, the professional element moved like a computer. Direction of tunnel was exactly as he had postulated; time of take-off, related to Earth's revolution and season and place, was so integrated that it proved his theory without further evidence—a multiple coincidence like that was almost unthinkable. He recalled, incredulously, his delusion as he fell asleep—no conspiracy, eh?

A chill tingled across his skin; but it was not entirely due to fear or the cool room. The magnitude and daring of the project lifted him as if on a star-brushing wave. Men! Little vermin of Earth's hide, grasping the depths of space in concept and act! Striding gigantic from planet to planet!

In the gulf below the mountain lay the Reservation of the Brotherhoods. That Reservation, he had learned somewhere, was often referred to as the Capital of Mars. Fair enough, since no permanent community had ever been established on that drear planet . . . It all came back to him now from clandestine gleanings . . . But *why* had no community ever been established? And why had man not reached out beyond the planets for the *stars*?

A shudder through wall and floor alerted him and he peered down into the thinning dark. The green light quivered, but its source was too close beneath him to be seen. He counted a dozen heartbeats. The light blinked once. A brush of vermilion-red a hundred yards wide, blinded sight, and converged southwards. Again the all-embedding BUNGGG. At the tip of the brush, lit by its glare, he glimpsed the dart-shape of the miner, as it might be his little model at home.

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His heart followed her out into the seas of night. He had never seen the sequel, even in picture, but his inner vision saw the vanes unfold, once beyond the resistance of the atmosphere, into helioceptors and cosmoceptors. He saw her catch the floods of radiation, as thistledown would catch the Trade Wind, and veer and tack at inconceivable speed.

For a moment, pride blew like the sightless gales of the void through rents in his conditioning. He, Pahad tuan Konor, was one of this amazing race that said, 'Let's go back of the sunset!' and went—even if they had to encase themselves in a hundred-thousand tons of equipment to do it.

For a long moment, he himself was a buccaneer, rejoicing in his outlawry.

Then he remembered April. Let the buccaneers ravage Cities and Hierarchy. But let them keep their defiling paws off that gold-green memory . . .

The Observatory personnel evidently believed in cool sleeping-quarters. He shivered a little and withdrew to bed.

In the warmth of the bedclothes, he remembered Nada too. Because of her, he was glad that his quest was no illusion after all. In the morning, he would do battle against both Community and outlaws. She was a girl one might go adventuring with if one came to her already victorious. Well, he would come to her victorious as no man had been in centuries . . . no Brother . . .

He woke to find the green light gone and diamond-pure sunlight slanting across the wall. His brain was as clear as the light. On, now, to victory!

He received, from Cat-face, a legendary breakfast of scrambled birds' eggs, sour-sweet fruit, and other, completely unknown, dishes. As he ate, showered, and dressed, his mind ran free. But he rejected all specific plans; the immediate future contained too many variables, and he'd have to play by ear.

He sprang to meet that future. "Now what?" he asked Cat-face.

"If you're ready, tuan, I'm to take you to Vilmoha tuantatha Gabor."

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They went, by bright corridors and spiral lifts, to a higher level. Pahad's apartment at home had been considered austere, but it was a museum compared to the room they entered. It contained a desk, large pieces of apparatus, a few brilliant decorative details; the only other conspicuous object was a big man, grizzled but athletic, who came forward to meet Pahad. His self-introduction as Vilmoha, was courtesy illustrated, yet it stirred in Pahad the uneasiness of the night before; it was too much like a friendly hand on the shoulder—ready to grip. And the man's light-blue eyes were like the hardest radiation, lancing through bone and brain. After the standard courtesies, he came to the point abruptly: "Now, what can I do for you, tuan? I understand your mission is urgent."

The lack of any reference to Pahad's unconventional arrival, was suspicious: It could be a matter of haste, or courtesy. On the other hand, this might be a master-conspirator. Pahad said quietly, "May I request *your* credentials, tuantatha? This business is not only urgent but confidential."

With a slight smile, Vilmoha produced a small directory and pointed to the entry, 'Vilmoha tuantatha Gabor, Director of Research'; a personal memo-card carried the man's voice-signature, and the spikes conformed, as exactly as the eye could tell, with the autograph in the directory. Pahad shrugged mentally: the whole thing might be an elaborate fake set up to deceive casual inquiry; if so, any further probing would undoubtedly be provided against in a similar manner, proof against any but technical scrutiny. Let it go; at least it gave some assurance, and he had to gamble. He handed over his own original research-authorization.

Vilmoha studied it with set lips and darting eyes. "So? Most extraordinary, tuan. And in what way are *we* concerned with the tides so confidentially?"

Pahad had decided that surprise was his best weapon: "Very simply, tuantatha. We have information suggesting that the rise is due to a change in the inclination of the Earth's axis affecting the polar caps. It sounds absurd, I know; you, or the Chimborazo people, might be expected to have detected such a change long ago. It sounds absurd; but so does everything else

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that has been suggested. So, I am here to request, with apologies, that you check on this officially."

There was no outburst of professional indignation. Instead, Vilmoha sat back on the corner of his desk. When he looked up, his eyes almost twinkled: "Do you know, tuan, it's just barely possible! You'd be better qualified to judge of the tidal results than I. But I can't think offhand of a single piece of work going on here that would necessarily be affected by a shift in the pole. Subalterns may have been adjusting apparatus to compensate for what they think are personal errors in routine readings. It'll be humiliating if true, but at least if we catch it, we'll be one up on the Chimborazo crowd."

Pahad's heart leaped up. Not evasion, but prompt co-operation! And suspicions exactly paralleling Pahad's own! "How long would it take you to check?"

Vilmoha grimaced: "About half an hour. We can do it with instruments too primitive to have been tampered with and yet too good to be doubted; we'll simply have to check solar altitude. Wait." He stepped to a communicator and issued orders, some in a double-talk so obscure it might have been code. But Pahad was no longer suspicious of every trifle.

As the half-hour dragged by, Vilmoha did his best to play host, taking Pahad the round of his laboratory. Pahad would hardly have understood the explanation of the instruments had his mind been on it; but his mind was clenched into a tight fist, grasping all the implications of the outcome.

Then, as they passed Vilmoha's desk, Pahad noticed a record-wafer lying half-concealed by a sheet of figures. And, as a fully literate eye will do, his involuntarily picked up the words on the protruding corner: "Title, Barbeekahn an . . . Author, Zhyhl Veh . . ." His mind flashed back: his chief suspect, Dapper Dan, had certainly made an extra transcript of the old book, for his employers. And how else would such a transcript come here except as a matter of treachery? In the infinitesimal chance of any other source, Vilmoha should certainly have mentioned the thing, and its relation to Pahad's report, just now.

Following Vilmoha out onto a garden-terrace, Pahad fought for mental calm. After all, if the man weren't acting in good

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faith, why this masquerade at all? Maybe they'd come up with some falsified proof that nothing was wrong; and in that case, they'd probably let him get away safely to carry their lie home and keep him puzzled. What he'd do then, he'd think of when the time came. Meanwhile . . .

Vilmoha led him to the parapet and displayed the view. Lowlands extended in the morning clearness, an ultra-lilliputian world, the Reservation. One could catch only tiny motes of reflection that might have been buildings, installations, or vehicles; but cultivation-areas were of unfamiliar tones; and certain patches seemed somehow something else than cultivation. Vilmoha talked: How had Pahad liked his attendant? Interesting people to deal with, the Brotherhoods . . .

Between Vilmoha's remarks, everything far and near was so silent that the whicker of wind around a corner stood out clearly. Across that singsong background, the hollow whistle of a large skeet banking down behind the building, made a sickle curve of sound.

Vilmoha's dissertation about the Brothers, stretched out; evidently he could think of no other way to fill the rest of the half-hour. Pahad clandestinely consulted his chronometer.

Suddenly Vilmoha swivelled the conversation. Using Pahad's own weapon of bluntness he asked, "I suppose you had some reason for your unusual procedure in—ah, coming alone?"

Pahad tautened; something was about to break covert. Perhaps he had better show his teeth, even some false fangs: "Yes, tuantatha; I was under obligation to keep my activities secret from certain quarters. My methods, however, were my own affair."

"Ah! Then your whereabouts are at present—unknown?"

That was very like a menace! Pahad made his counter-move congratulating himself for his own foresight: "In a sense, tuantatha. But if I do not report promptly, my findings will be presented to the Tuantoi-tan by the people I *have* confided in, and my disappearance would assure serious attention to my claims."

"You left sealed documents with a confidant?"

"Something like that."

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A smile like northern-lights flitted over Vilmoha's face: "*These* documents?"

From the corner of his eye, Pahad saw a shadow move on the wall beside him. He swung, half in shock, half in rage. An instinct that had slept for a hundred generations, uncloaked itself as savage as ever—hurl the assassin over the parapet and Vilmoha after him—and he stared into the dark eyes and frightened face of Nada.

The sun halted overhead and the sound of the wind ceased. Silently she held out a package. Automatically, he took it. He touched the delicate roundness of her finger-tips and drew his hand back in controlled aversion. So *that* was why Vilmoha had been holding him in play—against Pahad's foresight, he had held a marked card.

Nada! With her egg-shell beauty and girlish mouth! Whatever hard-faced Vilmoha did or did not condone, *she* had undoubtedly been party to the plot that murdered and plundered old Avor—she had directed the bravos who threatened, and would have murdered, himself.

She murmured, barely audible, "I'm sorry, Pahad tuan."

He felt it was trying to stop a reaper with a wheat-straw, but he made his play anyhow: "Sorry enough to get me out of this trap you've closed on me?"

She pleaded, "What else *could* I do? I had to."

"And now I suppose you'll have to stand by regretfully while I am—discreetly disposed of."

"No! That's why I came myself." She suspended him with an imperious gesture that startled him, and swung to Vilmoha: "Now you've seen him—the sort of man he is, fooling us all with a feat like that. I *said* if we threatened him he'd hit back . . . Don't you see, he *belongs* with us! You *can't* scare a mind like that with oblivion. We must make him join us."

"*Make* him? How, Nada tuantath?"

(Oh, so she was tuantath in this bogus hierarchy, was she?) Pahad cast around him coolly enough for a course of action: He could, he weighed it, hurl the old man over the parapet with a sudden rush—they were almost of a size, and youth, surprise, and a modicum of training should be decisive. Then, before

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she could scream—much—he could choke the woman at least into insensibility, drop to ground at the far end of the terrace where he had noticed a rough slope, scramble down, find the hangar, take his chance of bluffing the attendants, and get off in his skeet. Then he'd have to take further chances of being overhauled and destroyed by armed speedsters, and continuously outwitting their agents even if he got back to—to the normal world. And his story would be more wildly implausible than ever. He *could* be tried for murder or violent assault himself, though that would publicize his story, so, likely, the rebels would hush it up. Still—no use accepting your fate meekly. It all flashed through his mind between Vilmoha's question and Nada's answer.

She said, "Send him to Jarel. Jarel can make him see. And . . . he *belongs* with Jarel's people."

"He's too dangerous, tuantath. You've just pointed out how he eluded our whole organization. If he went to Toangahela and escaped, he'd be more than dangerous—he'd be deadly. Remember, he was Freeman-born, and we've never yet reliably reconditioned a first-generation Freeman."

The new-hardened but untried wings quivered on the brink of attack. Then a new thing fell into place, an instinct. Naturally he itched to use this new technique, violent action, as a solution for everything. But soft! Skill with any tool includes knowing when not to use it. And subtler methods offered greater rewards.

The elementary trick of leaving a duplicate report in the Legacy Vault, unseen, trumped Nada's marked card, where his boldest, best-contrived plans had failed. As he had said, his disappearance gave it weight. A few of the Tuantoi-tan were virile enough to act, sooner or later; and almost any action would pierce the flimsy veil of conspiracy now.

Meantime, he had to fend off death or some brain-tampering that even Nada feared for him. And he had at hand a means of both doing that and satisfying an intense curiosity. Even if he eventually perished without exposing what he learned, he'd have some excitement, and—what had he to lose? He said with a bitterness not entirely assumed, "Permit me to comment in a matter where I'm obviously partisan: But when before has a Free-

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man-born risen to tuan with a promise of tuanta? And in the real Hierarchy!" he could not refrain from adding.

But Nada overrode all arguments: "Vilmoha tuantoi-tan, for my services, time after time, I have been promised anything I desired. This is the first time I have asked the League for anything but more services to perform. I *ask* that Pahad tuan be taken to Jarel."

(Tuantoi-tan, ha? So Vilmoha was a Councillor in the conspiracy, was he? Well, certainly he was clever enough to sense that Pahad tuan Konor would pull down the whole murderous masquerade in ruins if he got the chance.)

Vilmoha considered a moment and then gestured surrender to Nada: "Very well, tuantath; you compel me. May the Future grant you aren't dropping a smutted grain in the seed-corn . . . Call the guard in the corridor, then."

Back in his quarters, Pahad assessed the situation. As to what would happen next, he had no concern; his course was set and the steering-rod locked. As far as that went, he felt carefree, almost elated. He had swapped death for a tremendous adventure.

But Nada! No wonder he had distrusted her! Instinct had penetrated her robe of innocence, even while conscious smugness fancied that he was exploiting *her* infatuation. At least, he knew now that he could trust no-one—most particularly a pretty, appealing woman. Not that he had much hope of ever applying the lesson.

The whole story opened out in new colors: Even at that first lunch, she had come primed to plant sterile seed in his mind and leave him to waste his energy cultivating it. The trip to the Convention Resort had, of course, been to let her accomplices size him up as a threat, or a possible convert; while he fatuously wondered why she wasn't cuddling up to him! He smiled wickedly to think how thus she had herself led him to that grotesquely improbable clue of the shifting star, which had upset her whole little game.

Well, he had snapped up the clue—give him credit for that—and stuck to it against all her shrewd discouragements.

His mind darkened: But why the murder of poor old Avor when Pahad was already on the track of the real answer? Some

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too-subtle idea of making him believe that CO_2 was the right answer after all? So they'd kill a man just for a speculative advantage like that! The icy ruthlessness of it chilled his stomach. Why hadn't they just killed Pahad himself and been done with it?

Maybe because Nada *did* have a design on him. Why else had she pled for his life just now? Well, he'd really exploit her, now that she'd played her trump. His betrayal and checkmating left him with no moral obligations. He bowed to her and this League as clever, vigorous enemies; playing against them single-handed, he'd have to outmatch them in their own methods and be totally unscrupulous. For Nada he felt no particular malice; nor would he even if he were splitting her skull—as he might find it expedient to do. You couldn't feel complete abhorrence for a girl who seemed to like you in her perverted way; and *she* wasn't responsible for his former mistaken notions about her.

But for this League that had outwitted and trapped him by superior force, he felt a cold-steel hatred and a resolution to smash it.

So cold was the hatred that he knew he could bury it deep under layer upon layer of affability, any degree of hypocrisy short of actually giving them vital aid.

Thus, when Cat-face brought lunch, Pahad found it easy to engage the young fellow in conversation. Told by a youth who unobtrusively showed both good manners and a sort of reticent pride, the details of voyaging and mining recaptured much of their secret childhood fascination. After lunch, Pahad idled away the afternoon on a terrace like Vilmoha's, though with no convenient slope below its parapet, till evening tinted the mountains of Africa.

Once more peace, that he had tasted on his voyage here, flooded in on him. The heights of sky and defiant peaks that the Race had failed to exploit, soothed and revived him. High sunset, flaunting flamingo-colored banners, was a fitting backdrop for the high and violent action that had become part of April herself as much as the green-gold peace.

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PART 2

A HIGH MOUNTAIN

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, "All these things will I give thee . . .", "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'"

ST. MATTHEW

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CHAPTER 9

LYONESSE

In the night he woke to a soft, firm pressure on his temple, and saw a figure standing by him in the dim light. An unknown voice said quietly, "Don't be alarmed, tuan. It's merely a hypnotic. You'd find a long trip in confinement boring."

"Why confinement?" said Pahad, his words slurring already.

The visitor laughed: "We'd hardly let you guess where Toangahela was, would we?"

"Nuh." He couldn't move. But going under was really rather delicious.

Delicious too was floating up to remote but perfectly lucid intervals of awareness: Mountain air laved his face, and a naked spangle of tropical stars vanished as the door of some vehicle lipped over him . . . Breeze again but hot and clinging and yet shot through with the raw smell of the sea . . . Tramp-tramp, he was being carried along a hollow-echoing jetty, an ancient king borne by his warriors to be placed in his burial-prahu and sent flaming to sea . . . A sudden woe flooded him: How fiendishly clever of them! They were taking him back to the University, and no-one would believe he had ever gone, believe any part of his tale. But he *must* see now, the inner secrets of this mighty, evil, wondrous conspiracy. He *must* see Jarel. He couldn't die without seeing them! He would have cried out if he

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could, like a man in a nightmare . . . Sliding down, down into depths—or was it out, out into depths? Machinery urged softly —skeet, or water-skeet, or a Miner such as Cat-face had talked about—long ago? A touch on his temple, booster shot for his hypnotic . . .

He came to the surface of life again with the suddenness of a tropical dawn. In a breath, he knew who he was, that he had been unconscious for maybe a very long time, that captors were carrying him to an unknown destination. With instinctive presence of mind, he kept his eyes closed; if they didn't know he was awake, he might learn things. His body was heavily blanketed, and his face winter-cold. He felt a slight rocking motion. He could hear voices and heavy objects being moved, but none near him.

After all, if he took no chances, he might as well be under narcotic, and this promised to be a crucial point in his journey. He opened his eyes a slit and turned his head quickly but softly . . . He was on the deck of some big water-skeet; it floated in a great cavern whose walls were carved and hewn into titanic buttresses and bays, of solid but translucent smoke-sapphire, a thousand shades of blue.

He closed his eyes and digested this data. *Where* in the name of the Race? The headquarters of the League would hardly be on Earth where there was no space or security—the Reservations could be only their beach-heads at best . . . Mars, then? But there wasn't enough surface-water on Mars to take a bath in, and this skeet was made to navigate wide stretches—no mere underground lakes. Well . . . Venus? But Venus was torrid, and they wouldn't air-condition a large cavern to outright frigidity. He discarded other bodies in the Solar system like a hand of useless cards, on grounds of gravity, water, fitness as a base . . . Planet of another star? But if they had the technology to attain one, why should they bother about Earth? Dead end. Fallacy somewhere but—where?

He opened his eyes again. For a moment, he didn't quite assimilate what he saw. He was staring into a face—if you could call it that. A human face would have made him flick his eyes shut automatically, if uselessly. But this thing had large, mild

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eyes, a muzzle with slot-like nostrils, a heavy moustache, and ears tiny and close-set. As he stared, it grinned; the grin was full of keen, white ivory, but conveyed affability, amusement, and courtesy—all of them emotions implying intelligence. Then it turned guiltily and was gone with a slither and a smooth splash, leaving him dumbfounded. He closed his eyes and pondered.

The visitor had resembled no laboratory animal nor picture of extinct species. The brain-case was too large, forming a primitive forehead, and the face had too much genuine expression. His mind went searching again. No life existed on Mars but the lattice growth that was neither animal nor vegetable but was said to have a remote planetary consciousness worshipping the universe. On Venus were slippery things, with self-refrigeration but no intelligence to speak of and certainly no vertebrate-type faces. Of course, the Brotherhoods might lie about such things, but the first explorers had had no motive to do so, and he had read all their chronicles. His mind was playing again with underground caverns on Mars where the water and dominant life-forms could have withdrawn, when he heard a step and felt once more the pat and numbness of a microspray hypodermic . . .

He woke again in a large room with yellow-tinted ceiling and walls. He felt extremely comfortable. For a while, his mind teased at the problems of cavern and animal. Presently he found he could move freely, if somewhat languidly, and sat up to examine his surroundings. They were cheerful and stimulating: gray-blue carpet; arm-chair and couch covered in a copper-red that stirred an unidentified but not unpleasant association; dabs of brilliant, harmonizing color in fixtures and abstract-panels.

But his attention was almost immediately caught and fixed by the window: It was wide and floor-to-ceiling, and looked out on a view that baffled him. The world it revealed was at least so like Earth as to defy distinction—blue sky with fleets of white vapor. Normal sun casting a parallelogram across the carpet, Earth-type trees, pleasant, rolling hills. But in detail it was all wrong: only along a small, obviously unregulated creek were

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fields of primitive grain and scanty root crops; the higher slopes were rough with wild vegetation used, evidently, only as forage for a group of large animals. In a fold, near water, stood a dwelling among trees, with a startling lavishness of flowers; it could certainly not accommodate more than a dozen persons, and it stood quite alone.

Yet, instead of being repelled by the barbarous solitude, Pahad was touched with a wild, happy peace. This was April again, in a new transformation! Instantly he pictured quiet walks into the hills, and meeting with the unspoilt, obviously cheery dwellers.

Only—what *was* this? Parallel universe? Time-travel to Earth in ancient times? Either would be a perfect sanctuary for malcontents; but, as in the case of other planetary systems, if they held the key to such realms, why all the to-do about exhausted, cumbered Earth?

A chair creaked, and he turned in the bed to see a man coming forward—guard, orderly, stewart, whatever these omnipresent fellows were. This one was tall and loose-jointed; his long-jawed face was young, made pleasant by smile-creases, and trimmed with resolute gray eyes and a crest of barley-colored hair. "Good morning, tuan," said he, "I was just considering giving you a wake-upper. How do you feel?"

"I feel fine. Where am I?"

"Toangahela—New Toangahela, that is."

"And where is that?"

Big-toothed but comfortable grin: "Nothing like the direct approach, is there, tuan? But I'm not to tell you that. That's orders."

"Do your orders include food, bath, clothes, and so on?"

"Absolutely, tuan. That's what I'm here for."

During a thoroughly satisfying shower and an enjoyably mysterious breakfast, Pahad tried to analyse what distinguished all these people from the Race, what Cat-face at Kilimanjaro and this lank man had in common. Skin color? Community skins graded from milk-cocoa to chalk-white; none had this sunned luster (few had his own freckled paw, for that matter). But deeper, no Race-member had that resilience and swing in move-

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ment and speech. These fellows had a group small enough to feel their individual thrusts, and so they had both self-esteem and esprit de corps. Such men could easily dream of usurping a world. And Pahad envied at least their spirit. This fellow, Benuha tu Hoa, was courteous and poised as any upper Hierarch, and considerably more reticent than, say, Avor had been. He served breakfast with a matter-of-fact dignity and, when he had cleared the debris away, asked casually, "And how do you feel now, tuan?"

Pahad stretched in the loose pajamas he had resumed after his shower: "Fine. Fit for anything. What's to be done with me?"

"You came here to meet Jarel tuantoi-tan. He will be free this morning, if you are ready."

Pahad felt that a walk in the hills would clear his head and arm his wits. But he determined to show no weakness either to this Jarel or himself. And, after all, he did feel pretty good right now. He said, "You people don't waste time, do you? I'm ready."

Benuha brought a costume such as he himself wore, tunic, sash-belt, and loose trousers tucked into soft, ankle-high boots; the fabric was dark green which by accident or, more probably, courtesy, complimented Pahad's coppery hair. Benuha's was dark red and on its breast was an insignia that was not on Pahad's, a circle containing a queer, irregular silhouette, silver on blue.

Pahad's mind teased at that symbol; he was convinced he *should* recognize the outline, as if he were mentally blinded to it only by some conditioning, perhaps administered under his narcotic. The only half-plausible comparison was with a tree, lop-sided of crown, squat of trunk, its roots clenched in the ground. Some hocus-pocus—tree of life, tree of man—he decided, and was not content with his decision.

But, as he filed out after Benuha, all such details were drowned by a wave of surging excitement. He, Pahad tuan Konor, alone of fifty billion, was penetrating the inner citadel of this dangerous League. If he never told the tale, nevertheless he was living it! If they planned to seduce him, they'd have to

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tell him and show him things. And he might learn more than they intended—their narcotics had not controlled him as thoroughly as they had supposed. How right Vilmoha had been about his being dangerous!

He tried to fortify himself with suitable thoughts of all that hung on his fortitude. But somehow, it was all only a pious blur. And really, the only fortification he needed was the eagerness, the elan he already felt.

As they turned the first corner, though, something bothered him, something wrong. . . . He groped, and his geometric mind defined what instinct had detected: Why, this corridor must be running through the air, fifty meters above the brook he had seen from his window, straight towards the roof of the house! He shrugged: obviously some delusion. And more important things were looming.

He kept alert for tell-tale clues. The corridors they traversed by swift conveyances, were ample, magnificent, and lavishly equipped with lights, spirals, and slideways—in contrast, the Control Tower and Kilimanjaro seemed shabby and destitute. The whole system was evidently enormous. Yet it had none of the swarming, criss-cross traffic that enlivened even the Old University. The occasional people they met were unhurried; men and women were variously dressed, some in Benuha's semi-uniform, most more informally—a few wore Benuha's mysterious badge. Once he glimpsed, through an intercrossing of doors, a garden blazing with noon-day color—flowers, not crops. Once they passed a spacious laboratory where a score of technicians or students were bending over apparatus.

Tall doors, marked with the mystic symbol, parted. A secretary, wincingly reminiscent of Nada, ushered them through. An inner door clicked behind Pahad, and he stood alone before the occupant of the place.

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CHAPTER 10

SATAN IN SCARLET

Both occupant and place bewildered him. Instead of a venerable sage, snowy-bearded but sinister, he faced a tall, powerful man. The beard was there but was black and clipped to a point. The face above it was sepia-bronze, a heritage from some Bedouin in an historical pansensor. The man had been standing spread-legged before a small, but incredibly real fire in an Atlantean-style fireplace; he stepped forward at once with a graceful courtesy, saying, "Welcome, Pahad tuan. I am Jarel."

"I have looked forward to meeting you, tuantoi-tan, with—interest."

"I hope not to disappoint you. Would you care for refreshments?"

As Benuha brought polta and glasses and withdrew, Pahad swiftly sized up his surroundings. One side of the room was transparent. Outside, a rocky path led down to a little, lonely beach, on either side of which savage black crags met an incoming tide and threw it back in a thunder and smother of foam. The sea was a possible escape-route, but—what unknown lands lay across those Viking waters?

"Now," said Jarel, "I'll devote time to you but not waste it. Let's come to the point. (Take that couch, tuan.)"

"I marvel you can spare me *any* time, if you're Tuantoi-tan."

Jarel flicked a deprecating eyebrow: "I'm not an executive, you know; just a master of ceremonies, story-teller, anything that can use my addiction to the dramatic. They have a quaint convention here that the Council should include one such privileged mountebank."

Pahad discounted that, but relaxed somewhat at not being confronted with top echelon. He bowed slightly, ironically.

Jarel proceeded: "You're here because we need men such as you *could* be for the most crucial venture in the human saga. You've come a strange path: You set out to save your little, private world; you were forced into fighting for the Race; you've

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grown, and burst one convention after another. Now you have to decide what you mean by the Race, and how you're going to save it."

"Oh no I don't," said Pahad to himself. "But you have my permission to fancy so."

"All you know about us is that we're opposed to much you consider sacred. You're certainly intelligent enough to know how your mind has been conditioned, till even questioning certain dogmas seems absurd and mad; but knowing you've a blister on your foot doesn't make walking on it any easier. The radical has always plumed himself on rejecting old-fashioned follies; how many have ever questioned the fashionable nonsense of their own theory? Your revolution's a thousand years old, but can you question it? Can you grasp another system of morals, and one that isn't fixed by instinct but that grows by reason?"

Pahad yielded a point: "I'll hear you out with an open mind."

"Quite an undertaking, tuan. However, if you can see past the disaster to your little sanctuary and sacred ant-hill, to see the great pattern, maybe you can untangle your loyalties and longings into something consistent. Knowing what you *have* done, I think that next step is at least possible. That's why we're here."

Pahad admitted the shrewd psychology of the attack. He only nodded.

"Briefly, tuan, what's the history of man as you know it?"

Pahad sipped his polta, and considered. Then: "Well, there were a few rather vague, pre-scientific cultures, mostly centering around the Mediterranean and China seas. About fifteen-hundred years ago, tribes from Europe developed the first systematic, experimental science, spread out into the wilderness continents, subjugated more primitive peoples, and founded the Atlantean civilization. Unfortunately, the civilization was neither consistent nor universal; its techniques were abused by their originators and got into the hands of even more immature peoples; and it succumbed to internal dissension and external assault. It sank into what they call the Second Dark Ages, though the First seems rather legendary and trivial by comparison.

"However, leagues of Island communities in the Pacific pre-

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served much of the culture and were strong enough to deter attacks by degenerate peoples. After some hundreds of years they developed a powerful civilization. The Atlantean technology and wars had exhausted many of Earth's original resources, so the Polynesians developed along biological and agricultural rather than mechanical lines. Their culture spread by controlled diffusion to the rest of the world. It was stable and soon became universal. We've simply developed it, for about a thousand years."

Jarel smiled thoughtfully in his beard: "Beautifully simple, isn't it? Oh, it's all quite true. Perfectly! Only it leaves out all the important things."

"Such as . . . ?"

"Things you don't know and I can't communicate in words. I'm going to show you, tuan . . . Your file tells me that you've been interested in neurresons. What are the latest developments in that field?"

"Developments? The long-storage technic was perfected over a thousand years ago. Beyond that, what was there to develop?"

"A great deal, tuan. Your neurresons give you the emotional patterns of the composer with glimpses of sensory experience. *We* can record the exact experience of a suitable subject, a blend of neurreson and pansensor, so that you *are* that person, emotion and experience and memory and will—while still remaining yourself on another level."

Curiosity quickened and glowed.

"More than that. I suppose you don't know the theory of time-contacts?"

"Why yes, I do. Time-travel is impossible, by the basic equations, but observation is not. As I understand it, time is puckered in the fifth dimension, and at points where puckers loop close to each other, you could strike through and observe if you had the right instruments.

"Well, tuan, we *have* the right instruments. Instead of wasting time on apparatus to catch electromagnetic radiations, *we* developed ultra-neurresons. We simply enter a mind in another era, and observe."

Pahad's hostility declared an armistice. Almost, this Mephis-

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topheles could bribe him with access to that! Was this the plot?

"Of course, to record an hour consumes more energy than a man-year-ration; and nine-tenths of the time, we're groping among plants and rocks; and when we do make contacts, not one in fifty is worth holding longer than it takes to size him up and his situation, and then we may have to follow him for years. Why we expend enough on this project alone, to support a whole City block full of Real Living. Wicked, isn't it?"

Pahad disregarded the sarcasm. A swarm of technical questions swirled happily in his mind: "But look here, isn't the position of Earth in space constantly changing? You'd probe into mere emptiness."

"Ah, but mental activity isn't subject to space co-ordinates—which mean nothing in a fifth dimension anyway. It localizes on patterns of matter—places and people. That's why you can sometimes pick up strong emotional discharge from someone you're congenial with, regardless of distance. So, when you probe in time, you break through to the same spot on Earth if it hasn't been altered too much."

"What about the minds you enter? Do they know it?"

Jarel grinned: "Not exactly. We discovered by accident that when we made or broke contact unskilfully, the subject experienced what was called déjà vu, an illusion that he had lived through the same moment twice. We've had on-the-spot observers for the past six-hundred years; no more time-probe, no more déjà vu."

Pahad made one of his impulsive decisions: In work of this sort, his interest would be genuine enough; it would help him adopt the protective coloration of a budding convert; and this would widen his opportunities for observation and escape. He said, "Would you allow me to go into this kind of work?"

"We'd hoped to do just that, tuan. But that's not the question now. I'm going to put you through a series of our records. If anything can revise your conditioning, putting it against a background of the past will do it. When we've *shown* you what words would leave dead, I think your problems will not be solved—they'll cease to exist."

(So all the sanities and certainties, and his wardenship for

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them would cease to exist, supplanted by this mad rebellion, eh?) He riposted, "And I'm to believe that these demonstrations are not carefully-staged fictions?"

"When you've been through a few, you'll agree that they couldn't possibly be faked. We've made a significant selection, naturally. You can judge whether it's fair or not. We'll judge if it changes your perspective or merely magnifies it . . . Shall we begin?" They rose, and Jarel escorted Pahad to a door that apparently led to the beach path.

But it didn't . . . They entered an open space, like an old-world garden. Pahad could not judge its extent because of a gossamer mist that led the eye a few yards and then lost it. Ahead, a gnarled tree stood black against the silver, like a painting on silk, and beyond it, the ground fell away as if into a misty gulf. A pair of ruddy-built, Atlantean-style chairs, under the low branches, faced the gulf. "Effective, isn't it?" said Jarel. "Built by one of our tuantoi three-hundred years ago when we were just emerging from hardship and could afford it. Rather a poet: refused a plain projection-room; called this the Pool of Time, where the Salmon of Wisdom fed on stars that fell from the Life-tree . . . Maybe you don't think in myths?"

"Yes, I know myths." His father stirred in him: clandestine tales no other children knew—or would have tolerated; the gaunt face and red-brown eyes; the voice telling ancient fantasies, truths behind truth, the priceless relics of man's divine and all-but-lost power to create: Kai-ali-ali, king of the sharks, and the lad Tumutoi who lived in a poverty almost as utter as that of Freemen, but windy, enterprising and glorious, and who lured the monster to its ruin; the Flame-ship of Rata-nui who slew the demon shell-fish. His father had shown him a fish, acquired the Race knew how, tiny but real as Kai-ali-ali, had shown him how a straw floated and fled ship-like before a breath. In his prentice days at school and University, he had gathered such tales. Now, like a cedar-twig dropped by Fate in a moist earth, his mind stirred and struck roots. "Yes," he repeated, "I know myths."

"I can remember the first time I was brought here," Jarel re-

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sumed. "I was about eight, and it was the first pansensor projection I had ever experienced."

A deep plunge into memory failed to dredge up Pahad's first pansensor projection. They had always been there, like the songs that spelled out your life, like your clothes, like the sweet-stuff on your porridge, cloying, horrible, but inescapable.

"I went home, all the windows of my soul opened wide to new universes, and my mind full of what I was going to do in those universes. Mother told me, the man who made this place was a Spacer, had been lost in space. He must often have seen this . . ."

From the mist emerged a superb, slowly-rolling Earth—mottled continents, snow of polar caps, sun on ocean, films of cloud —Pahad's abstract, geophysical Earth suddenly incarnate in a bubble of beauty.

"Relax," said Jarel, "rest your head against that cradle. And don't be startled. You've never lived in neurresons like these." The globe expanded giddily, as if they were plummeting towards the center of a continental mass. A blur, a swirl of mist . . .

His body was hulking yet agile, his brain inarticulate but shrewd and drunk with triumph. World-beyond-mountains! All his! Much, much! Swarms of animals, his—endless, easy food not the little shared out among so many back there. He had feared spirits like great birds in the mountains. He had feared being away from the faces in the sooty-red dusk, the tribe smell. But voices had driven him: he had craved to do what-was-taboo, to see beyond the mountains. He had desired this woman of his own totem. She, with her powerful body and great dugs, would breed many children who would raid for mates. Then . . . tribe again, and himself the big man . . .

A similar body, but the mind different as steel differs from iron. Hunkering in a cave door in the sun, he worked because he had eaten his fill, slept his fill, yesterday's meat was not yet stinking, both his shes were pregnant—and he was curious. If you rubbed stone long enough, as women rubbed bone and antler, would it grow sharp and smooth like needles, a weapon greater than all weapons, a great medicine?

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As he ground the half-formed arrow-head on the sandstone floor, idly, his eyes dwelt on the flower-blue mountains beyond the valley. Daydreams wandered in the waiting vacancies of a subtly mutated brain. He liked the mountains: big-joy-going-up! If the arrow-head were good, he would make a spear and an axe. He would be a great man and he would make a medicine about the mountains too—his people would sing to the spirits in them . . .

A third hulking body, but the mind only iron again. He was one of a band seceding from a cliff-stronghold, howling defiance at the niggards left behind, who howled back prophecies of starvation beyond the river, or death at the hands of outraged proprietors.

An evil thing had come. To kill within the tribe was untold-of. Yet the quarrel over the doled-out elk had ended in spilled brains and gashed ribs, and now this splitting up. The medicine-song-man himself had been killed, intervening in the brawl. That was no loss, because he would have stayed with the cliff-dwellers anyway. Besides, he had tried to make false taboos about children and hunting.

Worse had been destruction of the sacred spear; and now there would be none who could make medicine to replace it or to teach the songs. But he himself, Ungotatazohaté, had carried off the god-axe, the sacred talisman that ensured victory. The ancestor Talks-to-the-hills had forced a river-spirit to grind it for a moon of moons; no man could do it. But he, *Ungotatazohaté, would sink it in the skulls of many enemies, so he could give their food to his three wives, his nine sons and eight daughters . . .*

Jarel's voice came dream-like through the dream: "And that's the cycle, tuan."

Far away, Pahad's lips murmured, "Cycle?"

"New soil, tall flowers reaching, the weeds closing in. You can see it in a culture of bacteria. But man uses intelligence, of sorts, and does it better. The wonder is that he's progressed at all. Every so often, there's enough surplus for the dreamers and makers to scrounge a little, and pay it back a hundred-fold. But it only makes the weeds grow faster . . . Let's go 'round again."

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He was a nomad rider closing in, with the brothers of his horde, on the village of the Lake-men who grew food from the ground, ample food. A villager thrust at him with a clumsy pike, but he veered wide and sent an arrow through the man's thigh. A hobbling slave could tend the grain well enough. Slaves, and food for many sons for the humblest rider of the Kakhan! How great was the future! . . .

He was a robed man with hanging moustachios, writing a poem on a lacquered desk:

"Twice ten Winters have cast their snows upon this head;
Twice ten Summers have cast no drought upon the grain.
In every village street, fat children run like crickets.
The engineers of the Son of Heaven have restored the Great Wall.
Even this unworthy servant has received the scarlet button
For discovering the glass-that-makes-large." . . .

He was a lean girl kneeling before a great statue that looked at and through her with half-lidded eyes. She knew she prayed for the impossible: "Oh Lord Bhod, let there be food for the new child. Three have died. The land is a gourd brimming with lives; no drop can be added unless another is spilt. Let the rebel general prevail and set the land in order. Let him smite my cousin the scribe, who eats thrice a day and idles his time with magic circles and triangles—as he has smitten all scholars." Ah, to be changed to a swallow and fly to the fabled land of Bali, where was plenty for all . . .

"Always," said the voice of Jarel, "there was Bali, or Punt, Iberia, or Thule . . . or America, when desperation forced an overflow."

He was a man in breastplate and crested helmet, poised on the bow of a ship. The beach ahead swarmed with barbarians, a paltry opposition to a dozen bronze-armed crews; and the village on the headland, with its sod rampart, was a starveling precursor to the white city where his people could thrive and multiply. The keel grated and he leaped down into the surf, shield raised . . .

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He was a bearded elder poring over a scroll. From such scrolls, he mused, he and his disciples had all but achieved a thing that would grow of itself into a new bulwark and weapon for human power and human joy—a new way of thinking by symbols. Indeed, his inventions that had sprung from his system, had all but held off the Latins, though gentleman warriors and peasant spearmen alike had jeered at his grapples and burning-glasses. But it had all been too little and too late. In the street below, shouting and clattering, screams and crashes drew nearer. The Sovereign Republic, seeking Lebensraum and granaries and, incidentally, humbling the proud, was taking over his city. Feet trampled up the steps and a legionary halted in the archway, ant-like in his iron carapace, ant-like to seize and exploit and never to create. He exclaimed, "Ha! The necromancer!" The old scholar saw a raw burn on one knotty forearm as the javelin came at him . . .

He was a youth squatting in a shed by a low brazier, spooning up porridge that was queerly like the Freeman staple. He was saying, "But when every Roman had his own field and fig-tree, we made the all-conquering legions. Why not break up these great latifundia to give us each a farm?" The gnarled, goat-bearded man opposite sneered: "And how many would work the farms? You have been to the Games. You saw the proles filling the Circus as sand fills my two hands. We nourish these only by sweating each of us to feed ten, only by these great estates where they bleed the soil—or Egyptian wheat . . ."

Firelight faded into the silver mist of the projection-room. Pahad shook himself and turned to Jarel. On one score at least, he was impressed: That disturbing panorama had been no fraud; even these reckless people would not squander such a wealth of realism to delude a few converts. He *had* looked on the past through the eyes, and brains, of the past.

Jarel was smiling with leonine satire: "Always a few parasite intellectuals cadging a pittance to build beyond tomorrow. Always the Normal Human Animal gnawing away the piers of the viaduct before it can reach the far side, herding onto it. So of course it collapses. Then somebody finds new beams and stones and starts all over. That's what's behind all the cultures, and

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politics, and fine talk—the race between intelligence and doing what comes natural. The beginning of a viaduct has actually grown out of successive ruins; but instinct has always won out against launching the last span to a fairer world—so far."

"Your choice of incidents certainly supports your version."

"Think them over, tuan. Meantime, assimilate our city too."

CHAPTER 11

WHEN DUTY WHISPERS LOW, "THOU MUST!" . . .

Two pentads later, Pahad let himself into his apartment. He half-hoped to find Benuha in the arm-chair, all elbows and knees like a grasshopper, engrossed in the technical reports he seemed to consider light reading. (Benuha, he had discovered was of tuan rank in what they called the Surface Guard, but doing light, tua jobs while convalescing from an accident.) Instead, he found a wafer: "Got a medical appointment tonight. Program you should like at the Orchestra Theatre. Try the café opposite. Tell the barman I sent you. Ben'."

Pahad felt involuntary regret at loss of Ben's company, and conscientious pleasure in the prospect of doing some more private exploring. He freshened up and set out with his own thoughts for company.

Of course they wouldn't let him run loose like this if there were the faintest chance of escape. Well, if there *were* a means of escape, it would be so obvious that everyone overlooked it; and he'd just have to keep searching. He had a wide field to scan: His residence-corridor opened on a main tunnel, and this in turn on a thoroughfare; to right and left of the latter, other passages stretched away at irregular intervals, some of them already familiar. That one, for instance, led to the neurreson laboratory where he had begun to observe and work, and a

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whole district of such establishments with their own cafeteria, cave-park, and store-rooms. There must be hundreds, maybe thousands, of kilometers of tunnel—some derelict and so intriguing.

He came out on a balcony overlooking Central Cavern, and started down the double sweep of stairs to the main level. The Cavern had been designed to supply something like an open space, and was a medley of lights, passers-by, major offices, theatres, other enterprises, and more stir than any place else in Toangahela. The theatre and restaurant recommended by Benuha were there.

His meal was so elegant that he suspected he was being given VIP treatment, exotic foods from the Reservations, from the lavish hydro- and aeroponic installations, or from unknown oceans. Facing him was what appeared to be a great window looking out not on the Cavern but on some Times Square or Piccadilly of ancient days. He had learned that these windows, present in tens of thousands of homes and work-places, including his own view of the barbarian farm and Jarel's seascape, were nothing but the visual parts of historic neurresons—the fallow interludes between significant events. Where the Freeman pansensor was an obsessive drug, these were a stimulating background music.

As he ate, he strove again with the bafflement of the rebels' extravagance: parks, foods, costumes, windows, endless variety of dwellings, all maintained against the massive handicap of underground existence. One evening he had tackled Benuha about the folly, let be the morals, of such waste. Benuha's slow, leathery smile had made creases in his cheeks as definite as his mouth itself: "Don't see it, Pa'd. The way I look at it—we're outnumbered ten thousand to one. Suppose we economize till it hurts and jam in an extra couple of hundred thousand. Will *that* improve the odds worth mentioning? . . . No. Well, we plan to survive. We are we because we've broken the cycles and refused to be normal human animals. We're going to do something that can't be done. We can't do it by numbers, so we'll have to do it by ideas. One brainstorm, like I might get sitting here looking at those stars in your window, might just

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turn the trick. If we're wrong, if nature intends men for nothing but feeding and breeding and gaping, well—then we're wrong, and I suppose we'll go under in the fight to survive."

Pahad's untamed, disreputable subconscious hankered to embrace the doctrine and all its guilty splendor; his rational self acknowledged the force of Benuha's arguments. But something bigger, whispered briefly but finally, "You know it is one proof of this League's corruption that they refuse to Create Life—and on a wholesale scale."

He left the restaurant and stood irresolute, fascinated by the bustle and glitter of the Cavern. Did he want to go to the concert? Well . . . did he *want* to go exploring? The vision of chilly, derelict tunnels appealed only to the instinct for self-punishment.

Besides—the whole project oppressed him with its futility. Suppose he *did* find an obscure avenue of escape; where would he be then? He knew only, from odd gleanings, that the upper world was savagely inhospitable. He had an uneasy conviction that some post-hypnotic suggestion made him blind and imbecile to clues all around him as to Toangahela's whereabouts.

This fact was a grim reminder that, after all, he was prisoner of ruthless aggressors who were striving to subvert him. But just now, it was an added excuse for defying his conscience.

Did he want to go to the concert? Yes.

The first numbers were in the ancient Balinese fashion, inviting the spirit to caper uninhibited among tantalizing rhythms. Pahad delighted in their clean impact on a single sense, coaxing his imagination to disport itself without the clutter of dictated sights, tastes, tensions, and contacts imposed by the neurreson. The next group, something modern, was less to his liking, though he tried to adjust to it, in the interests of future enjoyment. In the environment of strong group telepathy induced by music, he could at least swing with the audience—though with an uncomfortable reminiscence of Evening Assemblies.

He was letting himself go cautiously, when a startling cross-current broke through: an importunity of someone staring at the back of his neck, impatient to make contact with him. He

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glanced around; but this ruffled the still mirror of his mind and destroyed whatever telepathic image it had been catching. Nevertheless, he had a strong conviction that the intruder was a man seated a little way off, isolated from any group.

The man was very big: his hands, hanging over his knees, would swallow any hand they grasped; his body, thrown rather despondently into a reclining chair, was not corpulent but bulky; his face was round, ruddy, and soft in spite of a clipped moustache. The other faces in the place had a common tone in their diversity—the enlightened self-interest that a well-balanced society evokes, knowing that the best one can do for ones fellows is to carry forwards ones own enterprise with conviction. But the big man had a sort of lost benevolence, as if he were searching for disease, frustration, stupidity that he could pick up in his big hands, fondle—and multiply—a do-gooder in a world without do-goodees. He was not looking at Pahad, however, and Pahad tried to dismiss him with a certain unsympathy.

The last selection was Atlantean-style music, Pahad's affinity, and he gave himself up to it, swaying with the audience though he knew this was dangerous to his aloofness. Yet it was so different from the neurreson; it was like walking in the forest on a blowing November day . . . And then the conflicting presence drifted across like a breath from a crowded, solicitously warmed room—the discomfort one always feels when company is not enjoying a performance: "What *use* is this sort of thing? Oh dear, let it get finished so I can go on to something really important!"

At the end, Pahad rose promptly and moved towards the exit with an unreasonable intention of evading the big man. But the latter blocked his way with a beaming, deferential smile: "I think we should know one another, tuan." His voice was apologetic yet condescending, like a large, soft hand placed on the arm. "I know who you are. *I* am Andu tuanta Remeha. Perhaps you know my work on high-pressure crystals?"

Pahad's mind gripped, as he uttered polite formulas. The name brought more to mind than high-pressure crystals! This was the man who had been killed while exploring the interior of Chimborazo, whose Reclamation Certificate had been returned

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by the Observatory to Science Center IV—quite a sensation. Only—here he was. Willingly? Perhaps not; he radiated distress like a bug scrambling around in a polished bowl . . . But feeling-out would have to be cautious.

Andu made the overtures. Would Pahad care to visit him and talk over their—mutual interests? Tomorrow? Next night?

Pahad accepted with dutiful alacrity, and immediately felt trapped.

He still felt trapped as he slipped away to the appointment and made sure that no-one saw him enter Andu's quarters. In contrast to other dwellings in Toangahela, the place was uncared-for as a bivouac. The welcome, however, was enveloping, almost smothering.

Yet the conversation dragged on so primly that Pahad began to wonder whether he had not simply delivered himself up to a ponderous bore. Till, presently, his eye was caught by a small box on a table, the one ornament in the room, a thing of polished wood with a silver inlay on the lid—the insignia that baffled him, tree, malformed brain, explosion. He picked it up idly and studied it.

Andu smiled patiently, tolerantly: "Very pretty, isn't it, tuan? Jarel himself gave me that. The Insignia is rather an honor—I suppose."

Pahad said with a nonchalance that he *intended* to sound forced, "For some reason, the Insignia seems to be a great secret." (All right, my lad, now you know I'm not supposed to know.)

Andu's smile was pure altruism: "You mean you actually don't *recognize* it? You of all people? Oh, come now!"

"I've a strong feeling I should, but I don't. What is it?"

"Well now, it's a shame to tantalize you." He proffered a stylus. "Put a dot in the middle . . . Now, draw spokes fifteen degrees apart . . ."

The restraint in Pahad's brain stretched, thinned, and snapped: "Of course, of course! The South Pole—of Earth. Antarctica."

"Exactly, my dear boy. So now you know where you are."

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That last remark took a moment to burn through. Then it bit: *that* information had not been asked for. It was a deliberate petty treason, pledge of greater treasons proffered.

This was a moment for Pahad's impetuosity. He said, "Tuanta, are you here of your own free will?"

Andu's face quaked like a bowl of cold porridge. He moistened his lips and mumbled, "Yes and no, tuan; yes and no. I am not *staying* willingly. I must confess I *came*—but I was wickedly deceived." He thrust his clasped hands before his knees, bowed his head over them, and went on with what seemed to Pahad a rather excessive emotion, "Don't mistake me, tuan, I cannot and would not deny it was wrong of me . . . I knew these people were in terrible, terrible error . . . But I thought, perhaps the Spirit of the Race would guide me . . . so that I could bring Brotherhood to pass."

He raised his face and his voice grew steadier with righteous anger: "I have spoken to them; they have never even answered me. I have seen the callous wastage in this evil city and realized that their hearts are hardened to *destroy*, so their descendants can continue this orgy."

The round, mild face grew almost stern, the deprecating drone took on almost a ring: "Every day, I have blamed myself bitterly. And yet, you know, tuan, perhaps I *was* Guided! If I can return to our dear people and warn them, I might expiate my folly. I cannot live at peace so long as I know that one precious Life might be added to the Community and fails through my neglect! Here are five million erring brethren to be brought back into the granary; billions unborn can be assured of life by foiling this awful plot; billions may be *added* if we turn this dreadful project to worthy uses." The face shone raptly. Silence vibrated.

Well, thought Pahad, that was one way of expressing it. He said, almost curtly, "That's what I'm working for, of course. The problem is, can we ever reach our own world again?"

Andu rose, actually did lay his huge hand on Pahad's shoulder, and spoke solemnly, "Ah, but we *can*. I was certain of Guidance when I heard of your arrival. Together, we can do it!"

"How?"

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Andu lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, as if his manifesto just now would not have condemned him to any spying ears: "As you know now, tuan, we're imprisoned not only by the exits of this city, but by hundreds of kilometers of frozen waste no man could cross alive unaided. But—these violent men have learned in their presumption to contend with desolations even more terrible, the bitter deserts of Mars, the dead wastes of the moon. They have fashioned armor in which they may pass through ice and fire, and live. And I have possessed myself of such armor for myself and a companion. I've tried it out, my boy, and it will carry us through."

Pahad probed the situation distrustfully: "Then why haven't you used it—if you're so anxious to give the alarm?"

Andu looked shamefaced and tasted his words before speaking: "Because . . . I suppose it is good for me to confess . . . I was too great a coward."

Not much cowardice in that, Pahad thought; even in company, in the indefinite future, he didn't relish facing the savage fury of the polar world. He steeled himself to ask, "How soon could we act?"

"Well now, as far as this armor is concerned, of course, we could leave tonight." Andu smiled as if deprecating an obvious joke. "It is stocked with food-concentrates, medicines, even stimulants. It has an atomic power-pack for heat and operating attachments, and it also draws energy for cosmic rays, as they call them. And I have learned to use its guiding and communicating instruments. But there is another factor, dear boy: An expedition of our dear people has landed on the coast to ascertain whether the stretches already free of ice give promise of supporting Life. We should wait till this colony is established. These thieves here won't disturb it, of course, because that would betray their presence."

The reason for delay was valid enough. In fact, when you thought, what *would* one do, otherwise, on reaching the shore of the polar sea? By all means, let the colony be in a position to defend itself before cracking things open . . . Yet, at the same time, Pahad felt an uneasiness at the Race pressing in so promptly, like blind protoplasm . . .

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To avoid being seen together, except casually, Andu shrewdly suggested meeting at the Junior Research Library. "You see," he deplored, "these misguided young people are *encouraged* to acquire non-functional knowledge in a profane form, long after they are of an age where they should be fulfilling their Natures and creating new Life for their wicked community. And it is considered quite proper for adults too to load their minds with idle, dangerous knowledge. Little do they know how dangerous! I have felt it no wrong to acquire what I felt I might need of it in this place where it is exposed to all. Even their adults feel no shame in going there and setting a vicious example. So it would seem not only natural but laudable for you to frequent the place. Go in the afternoon of every Fifth-day."

Pahad required no ponderous reasons to accept the arrangement. The more formal his relations with Andu, the better he could tolerate their incompatibility and run in harness for the sake of their common cause . . . Besides, this vicious library appealed to his corrupt tastes as a treat.

At the door, Andu had a final word: "We must be incessantly vigilant, dear boy. These wicked people, who would destroy a world, would think little of destroying you and me, or at least our minds, you know."

An hour later, in his arm-chair, gazing at the ancient farmhouse by the light of a gibbous moon, Pahad wondered. He knew so little about these Rebels, barely a half-dozen characters doubtless hand-picked to appeal to him. He could hardly imagine any of these cold-bloodedly liquidating him, much less committing genocide. Yet . . . they *had* murdered old Avor merely to frighten him, threatened himself and, at the Observatory, barely decided against taking his life or his sanity. The vigorous, rosy health of the underground world suddenly appeared as the hectic flush of an incubating disease. And the colony that Andu had announced, became a channel, almost within reach, back to his only abiding happiness, a symbol of the foundation on which his cloudy, April world was based.

As to his distaste for Andu, he didn't have to be fond of the man in order to use him; quite the contrary. He saw with a flash of insight how the fellow would not only get him out of here

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but would eagerly take charge of all the formalities and responsibilities that must ramify from their discovery. Andu would love that sort of bumbling. And he, Pahad, would take only the choice kernel of reward—next Chancellor of the now inviolable University, perhaps founder of others!

And thank Andu for drawing him back from the brink of apostasy!

CHAPTER 12

THOSE WHO WILL NOT LEARN FROM HISTORY . . .

Next day Jarel summoned him.

He entered the projection-room and took his place under the tree with an inconsistent, boyish excitement. The globe rolled, expanded . . .

He was a tall man in a coarse, brown robe, talking to a slight, elf-like fellow in parti-colored tights: "This fisherman I must question myself. Not that I think you are lying this time, Odo. Indeed, our Wehm has long known of this Western Land. But it is withheld to build a City of God, in His good time." His eyes grew keen and yet absent: "There, none shall be ill, since we can practice, without fear of the ignorant, the secrets of healing art that we know and search the depths of Nature for more. There none, the sound or the sick or the dying, shall be herded together with brutes or fools. We shall defend it with the blasting powder our brother Rogerius, in England, has revealed . . ."

He broke off as if conscious that he had said too much, but continued on a parallel track, "It would be ill if covetous men stole it and bred there like lice on a beggar, thinking only of bread and circuses like the pagans of Rome, paying but lip-

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homage to the beauty and wisdom that live in today and tomorrow."

The gargoyle face leered, imp mocking saint: "Truly, father, I think that the nature of man is to be ruled by the parts of his belly."

The priest gestured around the vast cavern of building where jewel-windows flamed splendid allegories and music thundered softly: "Men built this. A people may yet rise, ruled by its heart and its head."

A shrug: "Men can often be led to spend idle moments on such trifles—especially if you pay them for it."

He was a woman lying in a luxury of convalescence, gazing through the cabin door over the tree-filled valley. Bird-chatterings and a steady chunking of axe-strokes patterned the peace. She hugged a secret wickedness: she was glad *the baby had not lived. Five was enough. Yet, Mary Bourke had nine, the Valentines, down by the branch, seven, the Cotters, seven. "Multiply and replenish the land!" But—was it so right?*

Granny Thorwaldsen didn't think so. Oh, she'd said nothing, sitting in the barrel-seat there last night. She'd come across the mountain on foot with her herbs and spells, and broken the deadly fever. The spells were like cool hands laid on your very mind, controlling your body through your mind. At the same time, you saw what was in Granny's mind.

She had learned some of her spells from the Indians, not common Indians but the old man who had also given her the heathen picture made of tiny blue stones; he said it had come from the far South many generations ago. But she also made spells of her own.

All the Thorwaldsens had been like that. They had been here long before the real settlers, and they had been angry when the people moved in, had frightened some off, it was said, by their black magic. But they had not been strong enough for everybody and had given up. Lief Thorwaldsen had gone west after his wife died, after a great quarrel and near fight down at the ford. Men had threatened to come in a body and burn his big house that was said to be like a Norse hall, high up in the hills, unless he ceased putting his restless spells on their sons. He had

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retorted that now the valley was no longer virgin, it was no longer beautiful, it was ruined for his searchings.

His one child, Sigurd, had stayed with the old woman, a dark boy who spoke like an old ballad. He had come with her yesterday, and brought the sufferer a branch of flowering choke-cherry. Her own 'Lije, lint-headed as a dandelion-clock, was a good boy with the chores; but cherry and milk-weed were the same to him.

By and bye, the land would be cleared with barn-raisings, square-dances, hay-rides; till the resultant overflow of humanity spilled west on Lief's trail. When she was ninety, like Granny Thorwaldsen, they'd give her a party because 'Lije was a leader in the community, and she'd look on the valley covered with fields, and houses, and strange things—and it would not be what she had come here for at all, just the Tidewater country over again.

Maybe, when she was better . . . if she took the cashmere shawl to Granny for a thank-offering . . . maybe the old woman would teach her some spells . . . something to reveal the thing that never was beyond the next ridge . . .

Jarel's dream-voice commented: "This last, great hand-out was so big that the scraps left over for thinkers and creators were juicy. For a little while they almost had a chance of reaching higher ground before the population swamped them. They needed to; there was no land of Punt—or America, to move on to now, only places that weren't quite so congested. . . . This next one's crucial, in a quiet way."

The old man propped on pillows, confronted the dapper young physician: "You mean not *that the private rooms are all filled, but that there* are *none eh?"*

The doctor fidgeted: "Well now, I wouldn't say that, Dr. Westingham."

"Yes, I know. You have one corridor for politicos and such. Not for a plain Associate Professor of Botany. Eh?"

"Well now, Dr. Westingham, in a crisis like ours people mustn't ask for special treatment. Why I'm on the staff, and

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when my wife had her baby we couldn't give her better than a four-cot unit."

The old man considered him grimly. He already knew the answers but wanted to peg them out for the record: "But they took my money. For thirty years I've paid premiums to the Silver Breastplate Society, to guarantee me such-and-such medical services. And now that I want to call on them, you say these services don't even exist. I can't die in peace in any hospital, in this city of thirteen million—not though I've paid for it."

The doctor looked embarrassed. The twelve-cot ward was certainly no place where anyone of sensibility would care to spend his last hours. Three radios were diversely poisoning the air, the nearest and most explicit purveying a female vocalist like a blast of cheap perfume: ". . . Craaaayzy insaaayshabullll meeeeyuh . . ." The least sophisticated nostril would have detected that the 'No marijuana' rule was a dead letter. The doctor shrugged fatalistically: "Well, I'm sorry, sir. But I don't build the hospitals. The Peoples' Hospital Authority does that. I just work in 'em. We've done what we could for you: gave you the window bed first, and moved you when you asked for it."

"Yes, I'm on the coolest part of the griddle, I suppose. The window would have been very pleasant—if your animal-room hadn't been right below. Even here isn't much better." In fact, at least two large dogs, reprieved from a free-lance death in filth and starvation, for an end of honorable service, were holding forth in a tone of magnificent, if raw, outrage. The old man smiled thinly, satirically: "But see here, doctor, can't I have a little privacy at least when . . ?"

"I'll see what I can do, Dr. Westingham. Maybe a vacancy will turn up in a four-bedder. It would be less—uh, proletarian. Don't take that for a promise. I'll just do my best. O-kay?"

"Thank you. I'll appreciate your—efforts." He sank back as the doctor moved on, and closed his eyes. Nice young fellow, he thought, not his fault that medicine was now chiefly a matter of antibiotics and uplift. He dozed; at least the new analgesics killed pain without doping you.

When he next opened his eyes, he caught his neighbor, a suety youth, staring at him with mongrel amiability. The old

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man felt like retiring behind closed lids again, but an atavistic courtesy forbade rebuffing good-will. He murmured, "Hi, Charley."

"Hi, Doc. Say . . . I couldn' help hearing what you was talkin' about just now. Geez, that's funny. You musta had it pretty good, not to like this. *This'sa first rest I've had in a pup's age. I'm gonna be sick once a quarter from now on, buhlieve me. Yuh canbe sick in a three-roomer with four kids, anna Fellowship slipsya in here as smooth as butter. I think it's swell!"*

"Well, Charley, you can't be sick in a one-roomer alone, either; not as sick as I am." He thought achingly of his rare view over the Park, his books and tapes, his samovar. He'd never see them again. He'd have let himself die there if he'd realized he was dying, before he got caught in this weltering mass of debased humanity. (Two-hundred and forty million north of Rio Grande!) But he couldn't even go back; all his things were packed and a new tenant already installed . . . Then something burned through: "Four *children, Charley! But, my dear fellow, you're only a boy! Why, you're tied down for life, the way things are."*

Charley shrugged with pseudo-sophistication: "So what else is there to do? I'm no quizz-baby to go gettin' into a perfession or some other Gummunt job. An I'm fixed froma womb to-a tomb." His amiability had dissolved in a sort of peevish truculence.

The need for courtesy being abolished, the old professor asserted his privilege of dozing. He mused: Even his father had sturdily, loyally maintained that a race could live forever on the capital of a virgin continent. Even old Stanislav—well, you could *learn a lot from Stan; but only in the lab. Stan had believed that his work on controlled mutants would save mankind. So it might—if it weren't used to exhaust the soil further.*

His ear caught an unusual footstep, and he roused to greet a tall, nicely-tailored girl with a package. After due courtesies, she said, "I hope these are what you asked for, Grandpa. I had rather a job finding them."

He unwrapped the package disclosing a stack of flat, black boxes, split along the edges to expose their shoddy cardboard

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material. "Yes," he opened a lid, "these are the ones. Thank you, my dear." He stared at them till the girl took her leave.

Charley had been eavesdropping at a distance set by technique, rather than manners. He commented, "Some babe! If she'd fix herself right. Girl otta make the mosta herself, I always say."

The old man passed over both words and implications: "Charley, would you please tell Mr. Gandry his Dominican dominoes are here."

Promptly a delegation waited on him, a dissolute oldster and an unshaven man with pajama waistband cutting into a naked paunch. Westingham passed over the boxes. "There they are, boys." He'd learned to avoid the archaic 'gentlemen.'

"Say, tha's swell, Doc. These're just right. What was they, anyways?"

By experience, Westingham knew that mention of biological material would rouse superstitious dread of 'bugs' which no explanation could allay. "We call them glass slides, Mr. Gandry. We project—uh, shoot them to teach students."

"Oh, yeh! Sorta like them Gaybabe Peekies." The oldster leered in scrawny but evergreen lechery, "Well, these ain't no Wimmin, so I guess we'll put 'em to better use, eh Spud?"

Repulsive or not, the paunchy character harbored a relic of courtesy: "Well thanks, Doc. Anythin' we can do for you . . ."

"Um, yes. Would you mind turning the radio down a bit? My head hurts."

"Surest thing, Doc." They shambled back to some game of childish intricacy that always occupied the one table.

Doze again. Thank God for the respite—very temporary, he knew—from part of the din. The dogs, perhaps newly-gorged, had also abated. He smiled satirically: Yes, Stan had been a great botanist; but he couldn't add two and two even when the answer was already written big. India? China? England? Bah! It couldn't happen here; we were too smart. And doing his damndest to make it happen, to push the vicious food-population spiral another loop towards top-heavy, irrevocable collapse.

Well, Westingham had been smart enough to gather up the loose ends of self-satisfied, Homespun Genius, and weave them

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into solid fabric. Yes, now you could feed an extra billion, two —if you passed the pollen-slides on to, say, Mannheimer. Or you could shrug and leave the stuff for some chance or fate to unearth. Or . . .

From the game-table came a cascading, tinkling smash, a curse, and a cranky recrimination. "Ah, there's plenty more," said Spud grandly.

And if this new wealth were *dutifully poured out to a grateful people, would they withhold enough from the public trough to let the next fairy-godfather die in peace if he wanted to? Like Hell!*

The smile grew almost satanic. No, the Stanislav-Westingham legacy was being put to its best and most harmless use . . .

CHAPTER 13

THE PRIMROSE PATH

Pahad roused, critically aware that the story was insinuating itself into his sympathies. The old welsher from Public Duty woke an echo in his own heart—of course. But that had been a futile gesture too late—too late by a century. A century? Had not even the visionary monk, the maverick pioneer been too late? To grasp hesitatingly at the skirts of opportunity is always too late. Only a fiercer resolution can compel circumstances.

But that was hindsight. How did one see the danger beforehand, with enough conviction to stand up and fight it, even alone? He plumed himself a little: *he* had seen a danger—and acted. But now, all his strivings had turned sour. He ached to grasp the past and wrench it to braver shape . . . The past? What about the present? . . .

(Steady, boy, steady! That's just the dope they're trying to

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feed you. Don't forget *how* they're trying to grasp the present.)

He brought himself back to practicalities: "Didn't they have space-flight?"

"Oh yes." Jarel stretched contemptuously: "Basic theory. Got to the moon. Could have reached Mars if they'd had the nerve. A young, reckless culture might have spent billions and reaped trillions. But *those* . . . couldn't spare even a few million from social coddling of the prolific. They'd hardly enough left over from feeding to grind out a few gadgets and maintain an illusion of progress. They kept creeping towards the brink of a global war; and even that bogged down in the surfeit of cannon-fodder. All the ideologies converged into the same population quicksand from their different directions."

"And what did your Superior Intelligences do about it?"

"They'd been poisoned with sentiment. Fed aspirin to treat cancer—all aflutter with the cries of the patient." Jarel stroked his beard: "It's funny: take a million people and a thousand prime-movers, and things hum; take a billion and a million, and you can't get the system off the ground. You might deduce some law—like the changes when you magnify a flying-model into a full-scale skeet . . ."

"And so—Polynesia?"

"And so, Polynesia. We'll leave it till next time. I want you to incubate."

The first visit to the Junior Library made him feel conspicuous as a corn-stalk in a pansy-bed. By the third visit, he was basking in it. The pansensor-windows spread cloths of sun across floors and tables, and looked out on the lawns and towers of some long-forgotten university, alive with the youth of some lost culture, alien but nostalgic of home. At the tables, cropped or braided heads worked intently, rarely even glancing up as he passed. Wafer-cases made a multi-colored tapestry.

The wafers, he discovered with delight, were a feast of just the material he had tried to disinter from the Archives at home. They covered any topic he could name, neither by inane sight-seeing tours, such as he had enjoyed at Hierarch school, nor by the cumbersome surveys of the intellectually muscle-

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bound. They were skilfully-fashioned, gleaming guide-books through the foot-hills of exploration, up to the very scarps of the unevadably technical. Why! With these at his command, he himself might have solved the riddle of the tides without need of miracles.

What problems then, he pondered uneasily, might not any of these 'children' be able to solve? Neglectful, even contemptuous of the Great Realities, they sported with the nine-tenths of their brains that were an atrophied but feared relic in a Freeman—almost as if this gray mass were more interesting, natural, and even human, than the clamor of glands. To wipe out this menace to the Community and to his own April peace, you would have to liquidate the whole League, or at least sterilize and quarantine it.

He was drifting in that somber thought, standing in an alcove with a forgotten wafer in his hand, when he alerted, with a small alarm, to someone approaching him.

But it was only a girl, not even a marriageable one, by League standards. True, she was taller than any Freeman twice-mother of sixteen. But she was fourteen, he guessed, in flat years; and she looked immeasurably younger than her Freeman counterpart, as if at the dawn of something without bounds, not plodding towards the dull noon of a vacant routine. A rough braid of gold-brown hair flanked one of those faces, like a pretty little frog, that might develop into anything but would always be disturbing. She smiled and said, most professionally, "Were you looking for anything special? Can I help you?"

Something in him begged his warier self, "Don't scare her away!" He said, "No. I was just exploring. I've never seen a library quite like this one. I could spend years simply looking around."

Her smile transformed itself from professional to eager: "That's just the way *I've* always felt. That's why I got made a proctor. So if you ever want to find anything in particular, you can always ask *me*."

He caught at the only hold he could see: "Well, there's so *much*. What is supposed to be the best section?"

"They're all good," she said loyally, adding immediately,

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"The animal-room is supposed to be wonderful. Have you seen it?"

"No. Would you show it to me?" said he and followed her pert figure as she swayed her way among the tables.

The animal-room was certainly a show-place, as much museum as library, with cases of extinct insects, and elegant models or preserved specimens of creatures he did not know even by tradition. Pictures showed curious scenes of friendship between human beings and animals—a girl-child holding a long-legged, white-fleeced thing, boys coaxing a small, vivacious beast with a tail as big as itself, a young woman with a silver-gray bird on her shoulder.

Elisi, his mentor, almost buried him with an enthusiastic demonstration of literature. Together they leaned over a wide table heaped with her favorites—illustrated wafers that would project pictures as the graph was played, even books, not antiques but reproductions. She commented staidly, "We've found that smaller children actually love the books better—something they can handle, you see. And *I* think there's something special about them myself . . . Look at this one! Isn't that *good*? Any that you like, you can take out, you know. I'll show you how to sign for them at the desk."

He fell in with that suggestion at once. A few of these things in his room would be pleasant in itself, and a bond with this eager dryad. Her enthusiasm was contagious as the delight of a Spring day. He opened to it, unreflecting.

She sped on: "But if you reeelly want to know what animal life was like, you must meet Daddy. He does Literature, you know; but he specializes on animal stories. I suppose that's how I got interested."

"Animal stories? Who writes about animals?"

"Oh, an awful lot were written in ancient times. And our people secretly recorded millions of books when the libraries were being condensed, you know. So we, Daddy and I, have a private library by hundreds of people, Polynesians, Atlanteans, even earlier ones."

Pahad wondered if they had the tales of Kai-ali-ali and of the monster shell-fish, but he held those in reserve. He wisely also

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eluded an invitation to visit her home forthwith; if the hospitality were genuine, the offer would be repeated with proper authorization. And he withdrew gracefully, carrying a stack of Elisi's best-beloved chronicles.

In the vestibule of the reading room, a group of the oddly-grave, oddly-vivid youngsters was standing before a great metal plaque. He had scanned it before, but now, as they moved on, he halted again and read it over:

> "Your greatest possession is the future. Let no joy in the moving present, no nostalgia for the colored past, shut out that great horizon. We of the League, whose past is so valorous, whose present is so dangerous, and whose future is so boundless, must remember that future more than all peoples of history. If we fail our future, mankind will have no chance again.
> Let us never forget in our discipline, that our dream is the wingéd mind; in our secrecy, that free communion is our goal; in our poverty, that the thinker and creator must have inexhaustible wells on which to draw; in our fortress, that delight in life is our desire; in our piecemeal building, that wholeness is our nature.
> Let us, therefore, cherish in our hearts the living root that will climb into leaf, flower, and fruit when the ancient ice shall have passed away from Earth.

Discipline? Economy? Piecemeal? What sort of unbounded extravagance would they consider normal, then?

A hand fell on his shoulder. Andu, of course, anointing him with benevolent intimacy. In spite of the need for brevity, the man glanced up at the plaque and shook his head deploringly: "The Morning Star, they call it. Fine-sounding words to cloak theft and murder. They drug their children with it."

"Have you news?" said Pahad laconically.

"Eh? Yes! Oh yes!" Andu's conspiratorial glance around would have intrigued any bystander. "Come to my place—let me see—two evenings from now. Good, my dear boy, very, very good. You'll see: we are being Guided." He patted Pahad's arm and slouched off hastily.

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Pahad braced himself. A great pity that now, perhaps, he would never see the end of Jarel's chronicle. But—time moved, and the tides gnawed.

CHAPTER 14

. . . ARE CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT

But on the afternoon of the second day, he received a summons from Jarel. Relieved from the need to choose, he got word to Andu, and went to the silver cavern blithely.

His body, young, male, copper, superb, felt happy; his mind moved confident as a born swimmer in sunny waters. Behind his shoulder, luminous sky and sea fed his vitality. But his attention was focussed on the big, arched hall, the audience mingled of every Atlantean race, the historic, decisive speech.

The orator, venerable, benign, fitted his phrases deftly to the sacred dogmas of the times, without ruffling a delusion: ". . . torch of the Race passed on to us . . . dare not deny the Brown Man's burden . . . coral towers that will crumble or be cast down . . . a wave to reunite landlocked humanity with the open sea . . ." He ended to an ovation.

Surf rolled through the silence. Through the listener's mind flitted bright pictures: hugely magnified chromosomes—skeins of crystal glimmering in crystal fluid; microslender needles of light, selecting, disintegrating, blending, creating mutations almost at will; great blocks of crop growing faster than any jungle, perennial, inexhaustible, leaving space for broad playgrounds, solitudes of mountain, forest, and shore.

Attention reverted to a new speaker, but with hostility, though a scattered few hailed him, "Toanga! Toanga!" He stood serenely facing an antagonism that resented any attempt

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to dissuade it from its messiah role. He was a mongol-nomad type who, in past ages might have slain his thousands—but never the tens of thousands led to futile slaughter by such great-hearted humanists as the last speaker. Now he rode the harsher steppes of science, scourging soft lies and seeking far horizons.

He drew a breath and began, as if he owed it at least to unseen watchers: "We of the Pacific Universities, are the freest society man has ever achieved, a commonwealth of the best from all races of man. Yet—even we are beglamored by the ancient delusion of the intellectual: that we have only to open the purse-strings of opportunity, and men will buy happiness, evolve to wider life as we have done . . . No species ever evolved as a whole . . . two intermingled, potential types—homo domesticus, homo sapiens . . . here on the Islands, for the first time, homo sapiens has found refuge from the world made by and for homo domesticus . . . dissipate this treasure into a billion ineffectual pennies of charity . . . five billion paupers freed to glut themselves with monkey-fun and rabbit-snuggling—till ten billion paupers crowd back into violence, famine and misery. And the Islands gone!

"Have we no alternatives but to scatter our genes in the smothering mass, or to wither in a coral tower? Must we be slaves rowing a thankless cargo with our backs to the goal, and not a wind to fill the waiting sails of our true kin still in exile throughout the world? Can we not do more even for homo domesticus, from a safe distance?

"We can reach the planets, and hold them. We can reach the stars and make new worlds, each a beginning of undreamed things. But I, at least, know the future of this world if we sacrifice our heritage. It will swallow us, as it has swallowed all dreams, all vision, in its feeding and breeding . . ."

Already the audience was drifting from the hall in ostentatious rejection of that passionate dissent. The messiah mirage is a stronger lure than the most glorious reason . . .

He was an old man in violet robes and a vermilion mortarboard hat, Chancellor of the Universities and Secretary of As-

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trology in the cabinet of the Western Administration. He watched a deputation of bronze men and women whose rich sarongs looked subdued against the sundae of blazing shirts and jewelled holsters surrounding the Favorite Son of California and Oregon, Sheriff of the Rio Grande, Admiral of the Pacific, The People's Choice. The Son was bargaining eagerly, almost pathetically. He wasn't a bad sort: he knew his job, and if graft was the rule in his administration, how else could able men be drawn to the otherwise thankless task of holding together this fragment of the Republic? "But how about these Sovyuts, the Reds?" demanded the Son, "You been there huh?"

The ambassador tersely painted the heart-land of two-hundred-million 'nomads' weltering between the Urals and Lake Baikal; endless war between the feudal Commissars, with occasional leagues to drive back the Reactionary Cannibal Gangsters of Peipin, Delhi and Moscou; stinking cities where brutal European mercenaries were rather to keep the populace in than enemies out; endless mangy plains never meant for agriculture, struggling to support the load, raped of crops that made the next crop feebler; precarious hydro-electric power, wind-machines, hand-work—combustion-fuel only for tanks that were towed to the battle-zone by horses.

The old Chancellor wondered cynically if the ambassadors had painted to the Asiatics an equally candid picture of this, the most powerful Administration in America; two-hundred-million voters existing between the mountains and the sea; ancient business centers housing the hereditary beaureaucracy in patched-up luxury; suburbs spreading from city to city—countless identical bungalows each in a half-acre of muck-garden stinking of imperfectly-treated sewage-manure; swarms of children, skinny little backs and blue shorts, stupid-wise faces as alike as so many mice, tending the gardens or roving in listless gangs; parents working the six-hour day enforced by the Unions —straw wall-board, spun-glass textile, plastic utensils—plus four hours' Voluntary Service in the fields, yelling at mass prize-fights or sweltering in reprint theatres. War with the Southwest set off delirious celebrations; casualties were high, more from lack of hygiene than enemy action, but it was a terrific change

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with a chance of loot or women. For the women here, it meant freedom from pregnancy for a while. Besides, they had to reunite the Nation for the war with the Sovyuts that might come yet, though it had been smothered before by the Population Problem.

There you had it! Kids had a Right to get their marriage-thrills before their draft years, and fifteen-year-olds didn't have much restraint. And the Crooning Evangelists made infatuation a religion—Love is God!

He thought of the Polynesian children reared to statuesque beauty and clear-eyed intelligence, in the openness of the great wind; the youth returning for holidays, from Waikiki or Auckland, to the stately homes with rooms open to the sea and stars, the dancing and singing and music at night. Yet here they came to bring peace and abundance to the have-nots, to burn themselves down to a butt far from the beaches and fisherman-friends and sound of the ancestral palm-trees.

Well, tonight he would slip around to their quarters, tell them all he knew, help them to take control. Plenty for all, even for learning and adventuring. Intelligence in command at last, and no limit, no ceiling to the future. Space! . . .

The husky Latin guardsman, one of a slender cordon across the foot of the steps, gazed at the mob with a Yurrupeen fatalism he hoped was unnecessary. Fine for the Tuans up there on the rostrum; before any mob reached them, they could vanish through a trap-door. But not for a poor weed of a mercenary with a gilt-rubber spear and his sting-thrower unloaded because They were so dainty-fingered about hurting anybody!

That *swarm of rabid rabbits! Just as stupid as the swarms back home, just as malicious towards Brains* (he *could read print*), *but more vicious than Yurrupeens because they had not known want till now, and didn't like their first taste. Ha,* they *should squeal! But those beggars had clubs, stones, broken-bottle pikes, and probably stingers, loaded ones. The Students had been making stingers in their laboratories. (The Old Girl said, "Students of what? Their own Great Souls?")*

A Student had been killed when they raided the Tuans' experimental farm last week—probably by one of their own mis-

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handled stingers, because the guards there too had been disarmed. They had paraded the body through the little university town (a mere million population), and then made barricades and paralyzed everything. 'Gohorogucha' they called it, 'Active Resistance'; the passive government was helpless. Ha! Only way to handle that *kind of thing was by a charge of pikemen, officers with stingers. Give 'em some more martyrs till the volunteers for the honor ran out. He'd seen it back home in Yurrup, in Insbrick where the Tuans weren't so fine-haired. This lot here had promised to meet the rioters with a Constructive Program. Well . . . the rioting* had *stopped. But you could rebuild a barricade in an hour.*

This was to be the Program. It'd better be good. That crowd was of fanatical Actionists only; mere sympathizers had been warned to stay home. The placards they flourished were truculent quotes from the ancient Q'ran al Manifestah, the very words of the Atlantean Prophet Marcus himself: "Science is the opium of the people." "No truce with the Proletariat" (whatever they *were), and also "Polys, go home!" That kind of people didn't want to be persuaded; they wanted to exert the leadership of their Great Souls.*

The brass conch-shells of the Tuans blew, an uneasy silence fell, and that sugar-face, Reawe, began to speak from the rostrum. They should have had the Old Girl, Pepineh's wife. But she *was supposed to be a great-granddaughter of Toanga the Apostate who had opposed sending Missioners at all. Reawe was beginning with jocularity: He wasn't going home because he* was *home, born and raised here in Mongolia.*

They met him with a shower of cat-calls and jeers: "Renegade! Pot-scraper!"

He took better grip: Who but the Tuans had done anything about the food-shortage? They *had given the many-spiked grain, the perennial grain, the nitrogen-fixing grain. Plunder experimental farms would do no good; last week had ruined important experiments.*

The hostile cries were fewer, and obviously professional. Even this crowd, bravado-drunk, remembered that common-sense did exist somewhere.

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He pressed his advantage: Now, trees! A million square miles of watershed had been planted so far and already distilleries were turning out food from the rotation-fellings. But miracle nut-trees were being perfected to give a huge annual crop, three times the weight of a tree in its lifetime, enough to feed a billion people, delicious food . . .

For a moment the balance seemed to tilt towards approval. Reason had its weight even with this rabble. But, it should have been the Old Girl to whoop them up, delight them with bawdiness, put reason in a pungent phrase, offer what they understood —bread, broadcasts, and breeding. Not this benevolent pedagogue with his 'rotation fellings.'

A bulging, flat-faced woman was heaved shoulder-high with suspicious neatness, and yelled, "How long before we get these promise-nuts?"

Reawe hesitated only a second, but that was too long—an admission: "Less than fifteen years. In twenty . . ." (Oh, the Old Girl would have taken the breeze out of that fat-prat's windmill, with a biting retort: "Soon enough that you *won't waste to a bean-pole, Fatty!" The mob would have switched like Spring thaw to that.) But Reawe was bogging himself ever deeper, the crowd getting ever noisier . . .*

(He, the guard, had been waiter often enough at official dinners. Always tried to serve the Old Girl, hear what she was saying. It stuck! "Afraid we can't support twelve billion? What makes my *liver curdle is the idea that we can." "Sure, this bogus, native Hierarchy can coast for a generation on our unfinished business. But they'll suppress the intelligent native-born with us." "After us, the locusts—or maybe after our great-grandchildren. Does it matter?")*

The mob-noise had finally, and gleefully, choked off Reawe. It deferred when Fat-prat yelled, "Ah, cut the clack. We ain't feedin' kids on promise-nuts for no twenty years."

The sea of faces opened automatically in howls of agreement. The big show was on again, and to hell with reason! Always, when you pictured the Actionists, their mouths were open, yelling slogans, yelling demands, yelling abuse—or just yelling.

An unkempt youth in Student robes faced the crowd, bran-

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dishing a wooden placard (that could conveniently double as a battle-axe) and screamed: "White man's land for white men!"

The crowd responded with human discernment, "Waaaaaaaah!"

"No more Polys! No more exploiters! No more famines!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Our own Hierarchy, chosen by The People. Hurrah for Fefelu!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa . . ." A piercing voice peaked the uproar: "Let's go!" One fearsome moment of silence hung like the rim of a flood over a levee; then the torrent burst with a grunt in unison and the scuff of ten-thousand sandals, as shrewdly-placed herders pricked the crowd forwards.

The guardsman had time to bellow, "White man's land for white men!" (Fair enough: he was the only real white man present.) Flourish his dummy pike in revolutionary style, and head the rush up the steps. He knew where the Old Girl kept her tame birds; and those should taste mighty good . . .

"You see," said Jarel, "the spiral was getting tighter. It didn't take a hundred years from the coming of the Missioners to swamp all that they brought in a new flood of population. The people knew what their Rights were by now, and that there'd always be a fairy-godmother; and the intelligent were thoroughly docile. So there came a little Dark Ages your history doesn't tell about, just a dip, and things moved on into another cycle that was a debased repeat of the Polynesian age, Science a fevered search for food, Government a sweating struggle to distribute it, life settling down to our beloved Great Realities at last . . ."

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CHAPTER 15

TRAITOR TO HER SEX

He and Elisi approached the door with conspiratorial zest, a zest tainted in his case, with guilt—not from the act itself but from using Elisi as a tool. He tried to convince himself that with no ulterior motive, he and she would be exploring anyway.

The door, squat and marked with symbols of some primitive, chunky alphabet, opened easily by a crude latch, and closed by its own weight behind them. It had let them into a rough-hewn corridor, dim with forsaken-looking, widely-spaced glow-bulbs, and filled with a chilly smell of which fish was only one element. Elisi's company intensified for Pahad the magic that caves, tunnels cast over the not-hopelessly-mature. This one sloped up gently and curved. They started up it.

Elisi flitted ahead, peering into side-passages marked with more of the chunky symbols, studying closed doors. His disquiet about her spread, staining his thoughts. Out in the world, one rarely saw half-grown children except trooping to Projects. After the first parental ecstasies, all normal parents (and who was not normal?) aimed to put a child in the most normal Project Groups, and outside of home-snuggling, that was that. Friendship of a child with a non-family adult was not taboo; it was merely as unlikely as between ant-grub and ant. Friendship between a nearly-ripe girl and a male outside her age-class was not shocking; the contact simply never occurred. Now, in spite of his delight in the association, it still felt queer if not exactly wrong.

They progressed for perhaps fifteen minutes, excitement mounting with a sense of approaching goal. The odor grew more tangy, the air chillier. Elisi in the light, two-piece playsuit that was standard wear from fourteen to sixteen in the bright mildness of the underground world, seemed not to notice the chill.

She still baffled him with her age, older and younger than any she-Freeman of fourteen as a civilized woman is older and younger than her savage contemporary. At that age, the most

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successful Freeman girl would already have achieved all her prescribed life-objectives; and ninety percent of the tuantoi would be throbbing little bundles of biology, obsessively focussed, mind and instinct, on Fulfilment. Fulfilment seemed not to enter Elisi's world-outlook—unless she applied it to an incredible sweep of life?

Unexpectedly, a terminal door stood ajar into a cavern. They entered cautiously. Unmistakable daylight shone from beyond an elbow; but Pahad's lurking hope of an exit was dashed: between him and the elbow glittered two-hundred meters of dark-green water. Pahad identified the smell now the same as had greeted him on the coast of Florida, the primeval smell of ocean that brings nostalgia for the ancestral home to even the most urban. Elisi stood bewitched by the small, dancing waves and their reflected flimmer on the cave walls. Then she ran down to the verge, kicked off one sandal, and dabbled her toes in the wash. "Why!" she exclaimed, "it's warm!" In fact, the air was no more than May-morning-chilly. Hot springs, no doubt.

From the tunnel mouth, a narrow rock beach ran left to a hump-backed promontory. He strolled along it, to see if it might lead to the cave exit, but found that beyond the hump, the cave-walls ran sheer into deep water. Dead end.

When he got back to the tunnel, he found Elisi paddling, kicking up the water with her white feet. "Watch it!" he said, "The bottom probably drops off without warning."

"That's all right," she retorted loftily, "I can swim." Then added, inspired, "There's another point down at the bend, on the far side. Let's swim down to it! I've never swum in outdoor water and I've only seen the ocean about twice. Or . . . can you swim, Pahad tuan?"

"Yes," he said, nettled by her assumption that he probably couldn't, "I can swim." Only it didn't come naturally to think of using it for some practical purpose.

She skipped to shore, lightly ducked out of her halter (which she didn't much need yet), and began unknotting the bow of her briefs. Then she paused and glanced up at him half mischief, half concern. "I guess people don't undress in public where you come from, do they?"

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That was two humiliations in thirty seconds. He raged to himself at the abominable training that did make her actions frankly—provocative; and smashed down both rage and pique. "No," he said indifferently, "they don't, of course. But it doesn't matter here."

With exquisite tact and taste, she let the halter lie and kept the briefs. He shucked his outer garments and tried to dispel any lingering constraint by saying "Come on!" and charging in.

The rock did drop off five yards from shore, and they struck out joyfully, all other thoughts swept away by the clean exertion and vivid competition. She was a fair match for him, and they reached the outer point neck-and-neck, scrambled onto it and climbed over to the far side.

Just as well that he had not been hopeful. A rude triangle of entrance gaped another two-hundred feet beyond, and he could see sky and water. The warm current from the cave kept a clear lagoon outside, from which steam rose in the polar air; but beyond, the water was crowded with gaunt ice-shapes.

You *could* swim out; but without two-hundred pounds of equipment, you wouldn't survive two hours outside the little heat-oasis. Maybe, he pondered, they could somehow raft their equipment out, he and Andu; it would save a long trek in the rigors of the Antarctic. Or would it? This spot couldn't be ten kilometers from the central cavern whereas, according to Andu, the Community colony was 125 or more. You'd just end up with a longer, and probably worse, route along the coast-line.

He couldn't even tell which way the entrance was facing. Sunlight angled on the rocks, but he had lost track of time so he didn't know what date it was, or even approximately the solar hour; and the peculiarities of antarctic astronomy with its season-long days, further baffled him. Well, he might find a use for his discovery later . . . He turned back, while Elisi still stood gazing at wonders invisible to him.

His toes encountered something delicate and dry. He looked, squatted, and fingered. Fish-bones! A great drift of them, hundreds of skeletons, filling a hollow in the rock . . . Fish don't climb rocks to die in droves; and that many wouldn't likely be trapped by tides. Something had eaten them there, and whereas

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anything that picked the bones daintily, might not be formidable, he abruptly realized that he was at large in a world as unfamiliar as Mars. "Elisi," he called urgently, "let's be getting back."

She came promptly, tip-toe-long-legged, over the rock, but gave him a curious look.

He didn't intend to enlighten her about his sudden uneasiness, till they were safe back to the tunnel. But a waking, animal caution made him peer into the cave water before plunging . . . Was his imagination overstimulated, or *did* something move down there? . . . Was something rising through the glassy dusk? . . .

Something was!

He had never seen live animals more than four inches long. This thing was the length of four men. It broke surface, a tapering hump, from which a plume of steam shot into the air with a hoarse roar that echoed menacingly in the cavern. He could see, still submerged, a great, fanged cleft of mouth, with a little, evil eye near the corner of it. The eye saw them too and sized them up with cold calculation.

Involuntarily he caught Elisi's slender, wet arm and drew her a step back, which was fortunate.

With a lunge of its rear, the thing swung and charged the rock. The speed it achieved, in the twenty yards intervening, was fearsome and flung it up the slope to where they had been standing. He could have reached and touched the jagged fangs that rimmed its slippery-lipped mouth. Elisi's scream was one of healthy terror, not the see-how-feminine-I-am type. Then the brute hitched itself back and sank sullenly into the gloom. But it obviously wasn't going away.

Knowing nothing of animals, he instinctively took for granted that this low, murderous form would have a patience impossible to more intelligent and restless species. It could lurk for days. And they were here practically naked, without even fresh water. The only hope, not a very bright one, was that his host-jailers would miss and trace them in time.

Elisi's normal vitality seemed inhibited by fright. He shepherded her over to the snuggest corner of the rock, high above the water and sheltered from the frigid breath of the entrance,

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and made her sit down. She snugged against him, delicate, warm-cold skin; and he put his arm around her. After a bit she stopped shuddering and murmured, "Do you suppose Daddy will find us soon?"

"If your father doesn't, Benuha tuan will. And he's a useful man in an emergency." That might not be quite complimentary to her father, but it should be reassuring. He thought of her home and parents—the gay, eager man who taught literature and inspected dynamos, the pretty, graying woman who made music and invented foods. Their pansensor was not, as commonly down here, in the form of a window, but was arranged as a sky over a tiny garden. You could lie there in the evening and watch constellations go over, smell the evening delicacy, and hear the far-off murmur of the city. In that company and place, you could grow aware of yourself and of life. He had ignored the inner admonition that the energy used for this mad luxury would have synthesized another quarter child-ration. The garden was kin to his weeping birch at home. They even had it fixed to rain when the sky clouded; you could stand in the kitchen porch . . .

He must have slept in spite of discomfort and chill, as one often does after a shock. When he was wakened by the monster blowing, Elisi was asleep too, her head and hand drooped on his chest, her damp hair rough against his shoulder. Gradually, with marvel, he realized a cleanness, a release, as if he had peeled an old, dirty skin, realized its source . . .

In his world it was solemnly assumed that two persons of opposite sex, left alone, would infallibly take full advantage of it. Among Freemen, such solitude-for-two was as unattainable as in a beehive; its possibility, however faint, was a treasured privilege of the tuantoi, though some, like himself and Avor, disdained its pursuit. Elisi had hardly begun to bud, and the situation was grotesque, but any Freeman and almost any tuanto would have seized the last hours left them, to Live.

Yet, in spite of Elisi's repeated, innocent teasing of his libido, his only emotions were of enveloping tenderness and of awe for the future enshrined in her; they were more powerful than anything the Race itself had ever stirred in him. If the worst came

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to the worst, he'd make sure the monster got him first, to give her a chance.

He dozed again, musing on the strangeness of this creature's survival in a world sacred to the Race. How many species, with potentials other than savage voracity, had vanished before man's single-minded thirst to taste the joys of multiplication?

When he woke again it was bolt-awake. He and Elisi jumped to their feet simultaneously. The water of the inner cave was in turmoil, but they could see in its dark only a solider darkness plunging up, down, and around, amid threshing and sharp, violent cries. Spray tingled on their skins. Then the darkness scattered into fragments looming up from the depths; in a moment, the biggest of these broke surface, the monster, belly-up and gashed raggedly. A smaller one rose by the rock and hitched itself up. For a moment, Pahad cast about desperately for any loose fragment of rock; the thing was man-sized, and if it had killed the enemy it could be formidable enough to add some human bones to its fish collection. It grasped a broad, crude knife with its fore-limb, too.

Then, with dubious relief, he recognized the thing as similar to the odd face that had peered through this drugged stupor when he was first brought to Toangahela. It lay with its rear end trailing in the water, propped on its apparent elbows, swathed in some loose, glossy garment. It sank its chin into a ruff-like fold of the garment, grinned disarmingly though jaggedly, and barked "Ho!"

The only thing to do was to reply, "Ho."

Incredibly, it said, "Hurt? Hyou hurt?" It spoke from its throat with only twitchings of its moustached lips, but plainly.

"No, not hurt," said Pahad. Elisi was watching with parted lips.

"Ho-ho, ghood! I Hauk. Hauk khill Horca. Ho-ho Hauk! Hoya Hauk!" Then, as other heads rose around him, he gestured grandly, "Hmy bhoys, Hauik, Ahuk, Hoo-hoo. Khill Horch."

"Thank you!" said Pahad with feeling, "You saved our lives."

"Ho-ho, ghood! Hall htime khill Horca. Hyou khome, uh?"

The suggestion was good. Other dangers might lurk, against which this vaingloriously jubilant being could not protect them.

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At a reassuring touch of his hand, Elisi stepped into the water with him, and they struck out for the tunnel. Even Elisi's childish grace, however, was clumsy compared to their escorts who shot under, around, and ahead in a small water-triumph, as if human company elated them. The creatures sat expectantly, chins sunk in ruffs, while he and Elisi dried with his tunic and dressed. Evidently something more was awaited than mere further thanks and parting; so, when ready, Pahad looked at Hauk questioningly.

Hauk flounced happily: "Hyou hungerh? Hyou hlike fire-fish?"

One could not refuse a gracious invitation, though Pahad had misgivings about the 'fire-fish' especially when the party draped their shoulders with long strips of blubber cut from the monster. However, he and Elisi perforce followed their hosts as these flopped triumphantly ahead down the tunnel at a gallop that made the humans step out, and into one of the mysterious side-corridors. Here Hauk's 'bhoys' detached themselves from the party to enter caverns from which came a flicker of fire and the sound of husky voices. At the end of the corridor was Hauk's personal cave.

The next hour had the dream-enchantment of some perilous, wild tale enjoyed safely in the pages of a book. Only ruddy fire lit the scene, glossing his hosts' lustrous bodies (Pahad had discerned now that the 'garments' were really loose hide) and glinting on their teeth and eyes. The front extremities were flipper-like but very pliable at the ends, like a hand in a thin mitten, and with a mitten-like thumb. They easily grasped simple objects, such as Hauk's knife and a skillet in which his mate prepared fish. Besides such basic implements, the fire revealed nothing in the cave but heaps of dried seaweed that served indiscriminately for couches and fuel. The fish was very good though saltless.

The creatures seemed much more fluent among themselves than with humans, even though neo-Polynesian was a tongue full of vowels. From outside the entrance came a continuous low huffling and grunting, disdainfully ignored by Hauk and occasional heads peered in irrepressibly. Two pups dragged fuel

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to the fire and cautiously edged towards the humans, till at last the elder nudged in between Pahad and Elisi and sat smugly, with vast pride in its own daring, while Elisi stroked it.

Pahad, dozing again from repletion and his unaccustomed swim, gazed into the red embers, striving to capture the strangeness and beauty that quivered around him like a color beyond the visible spectrum. But suddenly, every head turned towards the cave entrance and his, automatically, with them. A dark mass stooping through the door resolved into a man, the hugest Pahad had ever seen, burlier than Andu, revealing, as he entered the glow of the fire, a broad face, squat nose, pelt-close beard, and lively eyes squeezed into arcs by ruddy bosses of cheek. He uttered a few words in the creatures' own hoarse language and hunkered beside Pahad muttering quickly, "Is everything all right?"

Pahad gave a rapid sketch of events, as frank as necessary.

"An Orca! Must be one of the last. Since we've developed and armed the Lithlua, they've been steadily exterminating those ogres—and *that's* no loss to Earth. Hauk here thinks pretty well of himself, saving two humans and sharing his fish with them."

"Isn't that done?"

"Oh, no harm. Only we mostly let them alone to develop in their own way. I'm only here because I'm Warden—Holvor tuanta Svantua. You must be the young man who came from Kilimanjaro recently. Elisi I know of course. But we'd better go now. The Lithlua have had enough excitement." He rose, coughed a few words, and led the way to the main corridor.

Some distance farther down lay Holvor's quarters, and Holvor suggested phoning word of Elisi's and Pahad's safety before a hue and cry was raised. Since Pahad had no hope now of concealing the escapade, and a very keen hope of learning more about the Lithlua, he agreed. Elisi seemed to know so much about the Lithlua that Pahad suspected she had not embarked on the venture as innocently as he had believed; but for that very reason she was doubly curious. And Holvor, the calls once made, was genially willing to satisfy all curiosities.

Moving around a laboratory that was a Lithlua museum, from

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specimens of their rude tools to a bench of delicate equipment for chromosome manipulation, the big man talked: "When we came to Antarctica, we found a few surviving ancestors of these, haunting the coast; they'd been almost exterminated by Orcas and Atlantean hunters. We were fascinated to discover such large animals still defying human food-pressure, and tamed some. A young biologist, Imiukat, delighted in them, believed they had a form of speech on the emotional level, and undertook what no man had ever done before—an attempt to develop a non-human intelligence."

"I thought primitive man tamed and encouraged many species."

"Not for real independent intelligence, tuan. For hunters, guards, toys, emotional teething-rings, yes. But never for para-human intelligence. So . . . we hunted the Orca, the Lithlua's hereditary enemy, and Imiukat lived to breed thirty generations, developing vocal organs and brains. Got fifty percent more cortex." He flashed pictures in a color-box, Lithlua heads and brains. "His successors worked for the prehensile thumb and taught them how to use tools and fire."

"But can they be further developed beyond their present level?"

Holvor drew his chin in till he looked absurdly like one of his charges: "For three-hundred years they've been developing them*selves*. We're not making them into caricatures of men. We only give protection, and observe, and learn. Interesting enough, no?"

Elisi, who had been raptly silent since Holvor's appearance, suddenly broke in with a lustrous face, "Tuanta . . . could I . . . would there be *any* hope that *I* could work with them?"

Holvor looked at her, stroking his chin: "It's a bit early to say. But there's no reason why you can't, if you qualify. I was surprised to see that cub lying beside you. If you can get their confidence like that, it's a big point in your favor."

"Oooh!" She sparkled. "If I only *could*. *Watch*ing something like that, seeing with their eyes. It would just ful*fil* something in me. And just think how wonderful it would be to show my children! Oh, Holvor tuanta, I'll work like *any*thing to

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qualify. Can I come up here and see them, sometimes, and talk to you?"

Holvor nodded gravely: "It might be arranged."

Pahad's eternal problem forced itself to the front: "But how can you spare time and energy for this when you should be saving every scrap for your struggle with the—outside?"

Holvor gave him a quick, amused glance: "Sometimes you can save only by spending. Looking through alien eyes gives us an insight into some things that might prove crucial."

"What, for example?"

"It's there, and it's very real; but it would be hard to put into words, unless you were a poet. But . . . well, they *live* in a world of heights and depths that the best airmen know only with their heads; they meet the ancient life that has been crowded from the rest of Earth—fish and octopods, crustaceans and the plankton that move like thunderclouds in the olive heights. They are knit to all the oceans of the globe by the currents with their flavors and temperatures. They know a oneness in all things, like the oneness of great music. And now, to the deep-green world, they have added the crimson world of fire in the caves, home and speech."

Pahad absorbed that. Then: "You *are* a poet, tuanta. But I still can't see the practical use of it all, in a pinch."

"Tuan, we have failed to conquer Mars. We aren't built for it. The Lithlua—might do it . . . The cold means nothing to them. They are adapted to low oxygen tension—can do without it for long stretches. If they can learn to replace the ocean depths by the depths of space—You see? If other types, tropical types, had been saved, we might do the same for Venus. But Mars alone will multiply the resources we have now."

Pahad waived the matter of the rebels' time running out, and pressed on into the fascination of the theory: "But wouldn't that be surrendering the future to an alien race, to non-human minds? They aren't our children."

"Tuan, who is the heir of Imiukat? His great-great-grandson who is a tunnel engineer, or I who carry on his thought? It's thought that matters, not protoplasm. In any case, we shall always be the leader of the confederacy; it is we who have be-

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stowed the gift of speech and opened the glorious alternatives of failure and triumph to them, and new horizons beyond every horizon. But oh tuan, if only we had all the lost races to work with instead of just this one!"

Elisi took her turn: "But how do you *know* so much about them? They can talk so little of our language."

"Ah but, lass, I can talk all of theirs. And do you see that?" he gestured towards a hanging object that Pahad had unconsciously assumed to be a Lithlua skin. "Wearing that, I swim and dive with them, I lie on the ice and pass the time of day, till they often forget I'm not Lithlua-born. That's why I keep so fat. Really, I'm as good at their tricks as some slow old bull."

Elisi sighed: "I could never do that sort of thing."

"No, but they need rather someone to encourage their new ideas. I think *you* could do that and not spoil them; you'd have the delicate touch that only drew out what was already there. I think you might be the very one to do it! You *shall* come again. But I've kept you long, and they'll be waiting for you . . ."

An hour later, Pahad stood back in the shadows and watched Elisi flit across the square to her home, turn in the porch to wave to him, and close the door behind her. His conscience was at rest, for during his report to her father by Holvor's communicator, he had found himself cast not as a misleader of youth, but as something of a hero; and however little he deserved the role, prudence and tact both forced it on him.

The little house, in fact all the houses on the 'square,' had been cut from the native rock in such a way as to give at least an illusion of standing free, as if they formed one of the legendary small towns of Atlantean times. In the sky-scape over Elisi's roof, a near-full moon burnished the white houses with moon-blue.

Atlantean Age: high-water mark of man's history when intelligence had at last been given patronizing leave to build amply on the ruins of its laborious past, to dip humbly into the gusher of wealth it had itself tapped. So long, at least, as it reverently used its liberty to serve the great ideals of feeding and breeding. Thousands of communities like this stage-set had been reservoirs

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of that intelligence. They had also been reservoirs of the sacred appetites that at length devoured the dream.

A light popped on upstairs in Elisi's house; and suddenly he was comforted. Under *that* homely roof at least, a clear lamp of dream was wisely sheltered. Elisi was a traitor to her sex, to all the Great Realities that should have been engrossing her in their rapturous traditions! She was not one of a chain of brief, meaningless flares; she was a beautiful light spreading into the dusk of the future.

Then he remembered chillingly: That dream, even Elisi's part in it, belonged to the monstrous brigandage against the Race.

CHAPTER 16

DA CAPO . . .

"Just a few today," said Jarel. "The cycle is spiraling in to its center where it will seize up solid and can move no farther. The pattern of the species is fixing itself beyond escape. The same growing pressure of the weeds, the same intellectual simpletons fostering the weeds, the same smothering of the tall corn. The Cities are just ahead, my lad. Let's see how men battle gallantly to become Freemen."

He was a burly fellow, a simple, manual type, who leaned on a rail and watched a ship unload at the wharf below, in the twilight. A scattering of others watched too, idly; near him, along the rail, was an off-white couple. He did not edge away; the ancient, washed-out Brown Man's Destiny still forbade distinctions of race or color.

Torches flared orange on details of tackle and human bodies, mustered and filed down the gangway, wound along the wharf and up the cliff-path, slow and solemn.

The white woman craned and peered. "What they *doin'?"*

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"That I know," said her companion, "I heard on the broadcast after the game. Some big cheese bein' brought back to his native island to get planted with his ancestrals. Some kin'a goofy highbrow idea."

She spat. "Highbrows! Scientists! Always wastin' stuff that should be used for Weddin' Bonuses—like them burnin' things they carryin' there. (What're they *for? Some kin'a voodoo?) Always countin' bugs' legs or how far off is some crazy star. Tryin' to put kids in schools when they oughta be havin' a family and enjoyin' life. Crabbin' for money actin' superior. They* oughta *go home."*

"How goofy can a dame get? They come from here. *I just tolja, they bringin' this stiff to plant with his ancestrals."*

"Huh! They's five times as many of Us right on this island as they is of Them. They're dyin' out with their one-two-kid fam'lies—'less they come down outa the attic and marry in with us."

"They done lotsa good. They brought the new foods, don't forget."

"So awright, let them stick to makin' food. And move over and make room."

The listener turned away to join the cortege. Something, he felt in his simple soul, something besides the corpse of a great Tuan was going to burial—the past, with its firelight and ceremonies, its space and dignity. And the future. From now on, there would be only an ever-narrower present.

He was a young woman concealed behind a pillar, grasping a sting-thrower—a neat little weapon shooting darts tipped with a deadly alkaloid. Her mind was in turmoil between implanted horror of violence, and tipsy exultation that this was Action. She was proud of her Marksman card in an Action Brigade, signed by the Leader himself; but the thought of dead bodies, even Policemen's bodies, gave her sick shudders. Still, the Committee had decreed that Total Terror was True Mercy. You must *obey the committee!*

Anyone in the rag-tag-gaudy crowds might be a Companion in the Brigade, allocated to seizing the Mars Authority Building. At that thought, she went all soft and noble inside. At home,

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rations had always been adequate; her mild, professorial father tried to give credit even to Reactionaries; her dowdy mother bustled about, preoccupied with drives and lecture-committees; and it didn't give enough Meaning to Life. Then these Wonderful People had made her See! Like dear Ada who did perfectly devastating posters of Fat Scientists and throat-tightening revelations of Hungry People Yearning. Already she herself had defied the 'law' by standing on street-corners distributing straws of aphrodisiac with slogans: "If they won't let you marry, kids, tell them you might as well be!" "We feed fifteen billion, why not twenty-five?" Well, she was ready now! Not a qualm! What Ada called, One of Our Brave Ones! The Enemy would just melt before the Brigades.

And then! We *would liberate all the secrets the Scientists were holding back—none of this sea-farming and Interplanetary Fraud—and found a True Science so every field-hand could solve problems. All those pathetic people well-fed and noble, no more Blue Laws about aphrodisiacs and Young Love, ugh! Everyone would have Modern Drama all about the triumph of the Revolution, and she herself would write wonderful things to introduce the Underprivileged to Good Music . . . Just let even this new President Hoka—Old Hoax, they wittily called him—try to stop Us!*

A shattering whistle punctured her beatific dream. Figures, thirty or more, were converging on the entrance of the Mars Building. Her meagre bosom swelled: "On, on the Big Green Team! I'm here, guarding the rear!" Two dropped, writhed, and lay still in the vestibule; the rest vanished inside. "On, on, make Them pay! Teach Them not to hit back!" She glared at fleeing civilians getting in her way. Morons!

A man braked to a halt in front of her, just a big, coffee-brown man looking worried—no brutal, undershot jaw, little, animal eyes, or turnip fists such as identified cops in Educational Cartoons; but his uniform gave him away. And, as he reached uncertainly for his holster, she shot him. "On, on, the Big Green Team! You *won't ration babies any more!" For a moment queasiness weakened her as he jerked, staggered and collapsed; he looked innocent and abused lying there. Then her civilized*

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conscience went numb with the intoxication of successful violence. Besides, you could see he was a Poly, the arrogant bullies!

A voice mouthed, "Good work, sister. For a skinny chicken, you sure got fight." Sight of the speaker turned heart-failure to relief: not the classic, starved-intellectual Revolutionary of the Cartoons; but he was just slipping on a green brassard; and his powerful, resolute jaw, steady, narrowed eyes, and mighty fist were reassuring to have on Our Team. He said, "You be ready, in case another comes to see what happened to this'n. I'll be right back of you, if you miss."

She felt about ten feet tall, with a face like those People's Heroes in the Posters: proud, fearless, compassionate, visionary. On, on, the Big Green Team!

Somehow, the time and place seemed to change very little—hours, blocks.

He was a slender, mahogany-brown young man, but infinitely more tired than any young man should be, slumped in an ornate chair behind a vast, polished desk.

Opposite him sat an elephantine character holding a sting-thrower levelled, and saying, "I have got to kill you, Hoka. It's the worst thing that has ever happened to me. So at least I want you to know why."

"I don't mind your turning on me, Belugo. But you have betrayed the revolution."

"That's just it. I haven't; you have. I trusted you to lead us out of this mess. You could have; you have that kind of brain. Lead, I said; create some big, blazing vision that even the block-dwellers would follow; rouse them up to scrapping their grubby little privileges for a great future—give them something to be free for, of freedom from everything. Instead, you've taken a poll of what they think they want; you've been a timid papa to rush them everything they squall for; you've torn down the last restraints and set up nice-nancy appeals. So the mob has turned even on you."

"And you," the retort was bitter with the taste of death, "you can make this blazing vision?"

The huge, sardonic face darkened: "No. I can only see how to steer this runaway bus to the bottom without smashing

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everything. Even you couldn't turn it now, and you'd wreck it in a year, saying naughty-naughty when you should use an iron fist. Me, I can save something, *set things so we won't capsize before they level out. That's all anyone can do now."*

A tired pride lifted the doomed man; "I have faith in men."

"Yes, men. *But the likes of you have made them just another insect. In every crisis, you've been a clucking auntie full of theories, not a damn-all captain shouting for volunteers. Then the likes of me have to step in and pull things together somehow —terror, and purge, and lies to wheedle'em along. This time'll be the last. There's too many of them coming to be changed by anything but Noah's flood, and not enough of anything left to more than feed them forever and ever. That's* your *doing, and this is your punishment—if* I *don't shoot you, they'll brain-suck you publicly. I'll have to finish the job, and this is* my *punishment too. I liked you, Hoka, better than anyone I know. If you'd led us over the mountains, I'd have followed till I froze. But now . . ."*

The massive face and the hand grasping the stinger tightened . . .

Pahad came back to his world, shaken by the crescendo of mass tragedy, the quenching of the last and brightest flame of humanity by the sodden beacon it had striven to light. The sequel he could foresee, now, and it fascinated him with the hypnotism of marching Fate: . . . too many of them coming . . . feed them forever and ever. The Cities, ever expanding, ever creeping towards final rigidity, ever weeding out their nonconformists—weeding out Pahad Konor; the Hierarchy, ever more obsequious, ever feebler, dwindling towards extinction; the polyp-mind of the Community drifting forever in a void without stimuli.

A light flashed: Noah's flood? Flood? A hope overlooked? Hope quivered incredible, beautiful as a Spring sky . . .

Steady, boy, steady! That's what they *want* you to think. Don't fall for it. Look at it in the clear light of what you *know* is right. Remember your own unchangeable resolve.

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Jarel rose: "Sorry to break in on that sort of long thoughts. But I've got to be off. We'll have the rest soon. And then . . . we'll see."

CHAPTER 17

BUT YOUR GOD IS MY DEVIL

Elisi, opposite him at the very supercilious restaurant table, was being a young-lady-biologist, and harassing him on subjects where he was barely one hard-pressed jump ahead of her. This, together with the most severe toilette her mother would sanction, made her seem almost as mature as a Freeman girl of twelve—though the comparison in ages might as well have been made between, say, an iris and a guinea-pig. Under it she was effervescent with glee; and under that she was untouched and clear as five o'clock of a May morning. He was allowing himself to enjoy all three Elisis in perspective.

Since the Lithlua adventure, he had gone through quite a soul-searching. He had been witnessing his first case of hero-worship, as worshippee, and didn't quite believe it. His simple sharing of a danger with her, his elementary caution in facing it, and his (unspoken) resolve to sacrifice his life however vainly if necessary, didn't seem like grounds for starry-eyed adoration. Therefore, he had a horrible dread that Elisi's homage might be Something Else. The thought of her even tainted, especially on his behalf, with the drugged obsession that had deformed his world and poisoned half his life, desolated him. Yet, after all, in a City she would be finishing her Joy Projects; in a Science Center she might be launching on a Trial Interlude; surely, even here, she must be ripening into *some* version of her Inevitable Cycle!

He had tried staying away. This made him acutely miserable till he had had to ransack his own deepest conscience to be sure

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he wasn't harboring the amatory virus himself. But her parents kept holding out their hospitality so anxiously, obviously relaying her pleas, that he had to give in. *They* were no fools and, blight it, they themselves had become a vitamin necessary to his spirit. Then he tried merging Elisi with the parents. But that provoked a vague unhappiness in her desolating him by contagion. She had been a leading lady and didn't want to be merely one of the chorus. So he had established the ritual of taking her once every two pentads to some matinee and a smart restaurant after.

As a matter of fact, few plans could have charmed her more. She could be her own long-legged, impulsive self getting taken out by her favorite uncle; or she could, with perfect impunity, try out her latest dream-self on her favorite hero.

Like now: She was being very careful not to put on airs and graces, but to talk sensibly. And Pahad walked in an enchanted childhood world he had only glimpsed in his own belated University childhood. His inner conscience, that cannot be deceived, was securely at rest about his motives.

Suddenly Elisi dropped several years as if kicking away outsized shoes, and whispered excitedly, "Oooh! When you can, look behind you and just to your left! Oooh! Aren't they bee-*yoo*tiful!"

Delighted to see anything through the eyes of her delight, he glanced around as if looking for one of the remote-control serving-wagons that acted as waiters. The cause of Elisi's admiration was unmistakable: a few tables away sat a brilliant couple. Both appeared to be of pure Polynesian stock. The man could have posed for any mythical Island demigod, magnificently handsome with high-bred cheek bones and full-modelled lips; he held himself with an easy, conscious pride that tamed his splendid black-and-bronze robe to understatement. The girl . . .

The girl was a perfect mate for him. She probably *was* beeyootiful—though not as Ruara estimated beeyooty; but mischief, eagerness, and sheer joy in life, chasing each other around eyes and mouth, the delicate vivacity of her posture and quick, soft motions, dazzled all judgment. That carefree blitheness, with only the faintest wistful shadow, filled her, as wind changes

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the mere form of a tree to flowing spirit. She wore a copper-red sarong . . .

In spite of that, it took Pahad five long, hypnotic seconds to recognize Nada, and three more to wrench his eyes away. He located a wagon, punched the combination corresponding to its little flag, and turned back to Elisi as if after a long journey.

She was almost jigging in her seat with rapture: "Aren't they *gor*geous? Especially *her*. Oooh how I wish I *knew* her. She's a perfect darling. And she must be from an Outpost, because I've never seen her before. How I envy girls who can run genuine risks like that . . . And yet . . ." She suddenly became sage, "I wonder! I'd say she was sort of lost too. *He's* an *idol*, really and truly. But he doesn't think enough about *her*, just that she's beautiful. And she's too *real* to be satisfied with *that*." Elisi looked as smug as if she really knew how penetrating she had been.

Pahad made talk by casually defending the man, but realized that this masked a sharp, illogical jealousy. He laughed curtly, rather to Elisi's surprise: His own sinewy, freckled hands, on the table before him, were a reminder that *he* was no demi-god. And he recalled the bitter way in which he had disowned Nada's intervention at Kilimanjaro, even while he profited by it—after all, he *had* been her enemy threatening to pull down her world, and she *had* thrown all her credit into the scale for him. He felt an overwhelming wish to apologize, before he finally sacrificed that credit on the altar of something more sacred.

He glanced back again, as if impatient for the wagon, one of the fateful acts of his life. He met her eyes.

All her blitheness and proud wistfulness withdrew behind a barely polite smile. Her eyes, shifting to Elisi and back to himself, said contemptuously, unmistakably, "You Freeman! Trying to corrupt one of *our* children!"

The flagrant unfairness of it sparked his temper. He blazed back at her, and turned to Elisi again. But he had, in that instant, acquired two personal objectives, tormenting as red embers against skin: to force Nada to apologize for her flash judgment and, by some obscure logic, more than ever to make his own apology to her.

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Still making lip-conversation with Elisi, he cast about wildly for some means of approaching Nada with at least a shred of dignity. But every plan ran the risk of a snub that would disastrously close the case.

His quandary was solved for the moment when Elisi exclaimed regretfully, "Oh! Isn't that funny? They just came, and now they're leaving without even ordering a drink."

He tried to solace himself with the reflection that he could have done little in the presence of that surf-board cavalier. He squired Elisi home, and she cooled him like starlight. He decided sensibly that a third party might best break the way for him, and called Benuha from the first public communicator he passed on his way home: "Ben', will you get hold of Jarel and ask him to locate a Nada tuantath Mehimehi, who's here from Science Center III, and call me at my apartment?"

"Well, sure. But, uh, why not call him yourself?"

"I'd hate him to *see* what a threshing I'm in. But you can *tell* him, and it may get priority action. This *is* priority, Ben'."

Back at his apartment, he stood gazing out at constellations slightly askew with antiquity; but, for the first time, that view failed to quiet him. When the communicator fluted, he turned so abruptly that he tripped.

Jarel looked grave: "I'm sorry, Pahad tuan. Your friend left half an hour ago for North America. When I traced her to the sub, it was already out in deep water. And I didn't think you'd want it recalled?"

"That's for sure." (He'd caught the phrase from Ben'.) "Thanks anyway, tuantoi-tan."

Now that the door was slammed, revulsion set in. Let Nada think what she chose! She was lovelier than he had supposed? So were deadly snakes and fruits. She'd had less right, far less, to condemn him unheard, than he had had to rebuff her at Kilimanjaro. By his diffident delay, he'd been saved from making an abject fool of himself with ill-considered apologies and protestations.

He'd give her both, yes! When he played from strength, not from weakness! When he stood among the Tuantoi-tan of his own people and meted out generous terms to hers!

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That thought kindled a raging impatience to set about his escape, the first step to that consummation. It did not quite drown out an elegy for something gentle, and lost.

Andu ushered him into the bleak apartment with unction, beaming a benediction. He could hardly wait to close the door before proclaiming his news: "Ah, my dear young friend, our time of waiting is all but over. Our People are taking possession of our first foothold in this New Land. Yes! The advance-guard has moved in! The rest follow soon."

"Really!"

"Yes, indeed! I have been diligent in gathering reports. Ah, my boy, our reward is in sight. It is heartening, uplifting!"

With one sector of his mind, Pahad braced for the looming crisis. With another, he hoped that Andu's diligence had not been too naively conspicuous. With a third, he realized that his magic vacation in this heathen paradise was ending and stern duty was taking over.

Andu blathered on: "Yes, this new Great Adventure of the Race is not just a new City, you know. It's the newest experiment in Human Living."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, yes! Freemen and Tuantoi together. No wretched class distinctions. This is the dawn of a Greater Future, when we shall *all* partake of the True Life. This little experiment in a virgin soil will spread through the whole Community, I know." He gazed into the future, dedicated.

"I wonder how they persuaded Freemen to leave their native Cities."

"Ah, my dear young friend, you lack faith in Human Courage. I'm sure there's been no lack of dear, brave souls willing to face privation and hardship for Radiant Parenthood and the Great Simplicities." He bumbled along about false prophets who had whispered that the Race was done, and would now stammer in confusion as it scaled new heights.

Pahad meantime awoke to an earlier remark: This merging of Freemen and Tuantoi—could it really be, as Andu assumed, the beginning of a world-wide homogenization? And how would

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that affect the University? Ah, bah! News of the League would throw a rock into *that* reaper!

"Yes!" Andu ended (paragraph, not chapter), "at least two or three, perhaps five billion souls added to the Race."

Pahad judged it time to take a stand: "And what about these people here who, after all, have made the new horizon possible?"

Andu frowned kindly: "Now, now, now! One would think you held them dearer than the Common Good. But don't worry; there will be ample for all, ample! Five million of them, pooh! They will hardly require more than a corner of this vast, this inexhaustible territory."

"Perhaps they may feel otherwise, tuanta."

Andu's frown grew a shade less kind: "Well then . . . *let* them feel so. They, like us, will have to abide by whatever agreement we come to." Then he lit up again: "That too will be a precious consummation! To welcome back even this handful of erring souls into the Race!"

Pahad reserved his opinion as to how the League would view such a welcome. He shrugged: After all he, not this comic conspirator, would be the real arbiter and intermediary when it came to setting terms. He switched the topic: "And how soon do you believe we should set out?"

Andu faltered. Obviously he shared Pahad's reluctance to take the plunge, without Pahad's curt resolve: "Ah . . . well . . . that will, of course, depend upon further news."

"But how soon would you guess, approximately?"

"Well, now, that's very hard to say."

"Yes, but *approximately*—a pentad? five pentads? a hektad?"

"Mm . . . more nearly two or three pentads. But—but you must not be downcast if we are forced to a longer vigil."

"Quite so." At least one now knew how long one had to tune up resolution and adjust points of view. One also had a deadline, however misty, to which one could hold Andu's unstable valor.

They had no other common ground for conversation. Pahad left.

He had stepped from a sunny beach to gray November; but the change was not altogether unpleasant. He'd developed a

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taste for action, and greeted action on a significant scale at last, power in its noblest form. He alone must devise the diplomacy to preserve the unique vitality of the League while cancelling its potential for harm, to preserve the Race inviolate while infusing it with a new spirit. This last adventure would begin with an act of courage, and end with—April once more.

Also, he would show Nada whether he were a Freeman rabbit!

He had thought the perversity of Rebel ways could surprise him no more. Now, as he stood in this underground garden, he was having to adjust again. It had begun with the very invitation: He had known Ben' was betrothed. But this fact which would have obsessed any Freeman and most tuantoi for months, was one about which Ben' never spoke except to quote some apposite remark of the girl, Betnu. Which, queerly, gave the whole affair a brilliance of intense and personal experience.

In a City, now, the Boy went about droning the evocative phrases: "Armzuncharms-armzuncharms . . . Fasumbrase-fasumbrase . . . Hartupart-hartupart . . ." At formal intervals, he visited each of his Project Companions and poured out his rapture to ritual responses; few of the utterances meant anything, of course, but they symbolized a craving like the bridal paean of a laboratory tom-cat: "Sh'snagel." ("Youpikumboy.") "Mahpiusboynaworl'." ("Becha.") "Howshever-commapik*me*." ("Youbuhcarf'l" waggishly, "summunus-changermin'.") Mimic threat: "Stayoffagras. Frever-sever. Som'dynoo nev'makusbloo." Intellectuals rumored, angel was an extinct bird, grass an extinct vegetable, probably foods of wicked, thrilling plutocrats like in the Shows.

Even watching the Shows and Games, trooping to Gruel-break that relieved the intolerable drag of each Work-hour, or at work itself, the Boyungirl wore a special electrode that beat out an hypnotic ground-beat of Sacred Phrases, like a prayer-wheel.

Ben', however, had remarked suddenly between acts of a play, "Say, P'ad, I'd sure like it if you'd come to my wedding next fifth-day—if Jarel doesn't want you or something."

Pahad was so warmed by this token of intimacy, that curi-

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osity only broke through later over polta in a refreshment-lounge: Had Ben' won your marriage-right the time he got hurt? Oh, partly; that tied it. About, uh, children; were they too laurels of worth?

"In a way P'ad. *We* don't have a ration, but it goes deeper. You see, anyone mature enough to marry, naturally thinks before having a kid; you'd just naturally be ashamed of appearing as a parent when you were only half-proved as a person. And you're guided by what Toangahela needs, and how well you can provide it. Some folks are encouraged to have several. You see, we haven't sexed ourselves into such a jam that sex itself is lock-stepped."

"You rather despise sex and love and family, don't you?"

"Great Future, no! Only—well, they're just one ingredient of a world, Freeman take your choice." To Pahad, it had been double-talk. Yet unlike the Freeman pre-nuptial litany, it hinted at a very clear-cut sense.

And now, this ceremony—if you could call it that! It was almost over already: A few simple, if beautifully-phrased, statements to an officiating high-rank friend . . .

Why! A Freeman ceremony went on all day: You breakfasted on special Raptrcakes sodden with Lovunsurp; your Companions each got one, but for once in life, *you* gorged. Each Companion told a Spicy Story about Lov'n or Eat'n—each family had its traditional Story. Then the Boyungirl had each a thimbleful of symbolic polta, tasting like turpentine but, acting on those weak organisms, enough to begin breaking down inhibitions. (One thing Freemen did envy tuantoi was indulgence in polta at any time. But, of course, poor devils, they had to have something to compensate them!)

The Boy got a second thimbleful while the Girl took her female Companions to inspect the Nestablis. There she displayed her household equipment in ritual sequence to a refrain of "Awwww*dor*ln!" as each item was presented. Cases were rumored where equipment had been found Diffrunt—lacking or in excess; but these were only mythical scare-stories.

The Dorlncupl and entourage then took possession of the Assembly Hall for the day. (A City Block was of exactly the size

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that could keep the Hall steadily in service.) The ceremony was an endless orgy of songs ringing the changes on the Great Realities: Burnunkissus-blissus, drimzalcumtrew, tgetherfrever, and the rest. Tuantoi libraries recorded old songs that had lost all trace of meaning, become too Hard, and been dropped.

The Companions droned half-understood things about "Teersthruayeers" and "Fragetyayet". Jealousy and third-man-out emotion were a rich source of Reality. But in a world of utter and uniform perfection, where one mate was as like another as possible, this drama lasted only up to the Bridal unless, perhaps, as a vague hankering for some lost Alternate with a peculiarly divine gift for necking. However, since the whole Project Group would be ecstatically paired off (within its own ranks, of course) in less than a hektad, any real wallowing in the songs was pure, temporary self-indulgence.

The Dorlncupl sat in the bridal seat, in a sort of overwrought daze, and the great pansensor-neurreson (referred to in this ceremony by the antique title Preechrmun) souped up this solemn climax of the Cycle where adolescent cuteness merged in the sublime stream of Mature Reality.

Evening Assembly momentarily merged this Reality with the Plasm, sanctifying it. Immediately after, the Group wended its way to the Nestablis, singing the hymeneal chant: "Rompundownanile, innalilwile, rompundownanile, innalilwile." Some uttered formal noises, holding the nose and hooting through cupped hands. (Tuantoi antiquarians said this last symbolized sacred horns, crumbled to dust in the far, unimportant past, relics of still more ancient ground-skeets.) At the Nestablis, the Companions made a token effort to scuffle in too; but the Boy manfully closed the door in their faces . . . So it had been since the Human Animal had attained the summit of Freemanhood. So it would be thrallternty. Sweet!

A tuanto wedding was more staid: more and better polta, less (and more articulate) song, subtler Stories. A few eccentrics merely registered without ceremony. Not Ruara, though!

It was Pahad's turn, near the end of the short line-up, to lay his hands on Betnu's shoulders and wish her Brave Future—the ancient nose-rub being omitted. Even though not a raving

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beauty, she was something unique and delightful, like all Rebel girls. She was willowy and mongoloid and, for one disturbing, pulse-quickening moment, he wondered strangely what life would be like shared with her. He envied Ben'.

The latter, gripping his hand, remarked, "See you next fifth-day, Pa'd." And Pahad departed freshly dumbfounded. He had never before heard of newlyweds who didn't remain incommunicado, feverishly wearing the colors off whatever butterfly-wing of enchantment they had captured. At least till the Neighbor-women certified that the Cycle was to be excitingly renewed by a Lulstranjr.

Somehow, he was glad for several reasons that he'd be seeing Ben' in a few days, and maybe Betnu too. He mightn't be seeing them very often any more.

CHAPTER 18

. . . AL FINE

"And now," said Jarel sardonically, "the last act—the one you know all about already. Only the cycle doesn't quite apply any more. For one thing, the spiral's grown so tight now, that new-won soil means no fresh crop of vision because the weeds move in at once. And also, my dear Pahad tuan, something (shall we say human intelligence as distinct from the human animal?) has at last broken free and shot off on a tangent. Well . . ."

. . . He was a young man in petty crowd that spilled from a unit into a corridor. Crowd and corridor were like those of a City as a fetus is like a grown organism. The crowd was, indeed, chattering with a fluency the Freeman had lost, but on the Real topics: who was marrying whom, the Programs—even after an evening of it. He thirsted feverishly to break away from the des-

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perate loneliness of Family Rally, to enjoy human contact, without the Great Simplicities.

As if conjured by his desire, a girl jostled him on the dim stairs. His irascible scowl changed as if bursting from a tunnel: "Mara! They'll see you. Go wait on the bridge."

Her hooded face, her laugh, had a tang of wild raspberries after pumpkin-apples: "Fool! Who'd notice that I'm not your cousin Darla? I'm hungry to talk to you."

They strolled down a chasm of street, still City-fetus: too much useless vegetation, blocks too diverse, unscheduled couples cutie-pie-hand-in-hand, even vehicles glaring past, but all too familiar. Mara said, quick and soft, "They authorized the Observatories, tonight."

Triumph flared in him like sheet-lightning, leaving a doubtful after-dark. "The first step. At least we're not just on paper now. But what a terrific way we have to climb."

"Once we're with people, *I can do* anything. *We're like an army where you can see only your own platoon. How* could *the Polys have given up living with their own kind?"*

"They didn't believe they were *giving it up. They'd tinkered with plants, so they thought they could hatch dragon-flies from termite-eggs. Toanga the Apostate knew! They hate him because he was right—and point to all this as proof he was wrong!"*

She burst out, "Suppose he'd swung it then! *When they still had all the forests and animals, and even oil, and unreclaimed land. And sifted out all the strong genes."*

"Not all—that's almost impossible. Just thinned them down. But the thinning's more vicious with every generation, with every fresh billion."

"True. There's us, *Denisu."*

"Yes. And we're launching a canoe through ice, to do what Toanga could have done with a prahu on Summer seas. It's the last revolt—not for the incompetent, the prolific, the fools who painted themselves into a corner, the rights-whiners, not for the self-anointed messiahs and yearning-arms, just for the intelligent. It should have been the first."

"We're only plain people, Denisu."

"Sure. Not the smart, not the ruthless winners, the card-

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indexes, the monomaniacs. But not morons either. Our past's been sacrificed for the moron by the neurotic."

She shook his arm: "Denisu, forget it! Let's look forwards. If it's a big fight, so much the better, you used to say. We've got the Observatories anyhow."

"A fluke. Know why? As contact-man, I know. They're abolishing the roads: fifteen million kilometers in America, ten meters wide, makes a hundred and fifty thousand square kilometers—fifteen million new rations. So they're gambling a tiny fraction for bigger profits yet."

She bucked his pessimism: "All upswings of life have been flukes, but they keep happening. You're a leader—or you used to be. You tell me what the next one will be."

He shrugged but thawed a little: "Oh, they'll ban domestic animals in about fifty years. Tears and Sentiment, but Realities come first. Two billion denatured pets can make room for two-hundred million Lives. We'll get some big gleanings from that, reorganize the Brotherhoods as a refuge for manual intelligence. And then—Mars in a canoe."

They leaned on a bridge-parapet, their usual spy-proof rendezvous. Below, the river ran sinister as the Styx. A parsimony of lamps betrayed, rather than revealed, the City massed on both banks. He brooded: "Twenty-three billion Lives—for what? No roads; no place any different from home. No other life; Great Realities can't tolerate little ones. Nothing Real in the universe but the Community; nothing Real in the Community but the Cycles; nothing Real even in those, but monkey-fun and bunny-snuggling. Language shrinking to reflex cries. Skills, automatic. Ninety-nine percent of what makes us human swept into the trash-bin."

"That just makes them weaker, Denisu, not us."

"They can crush us. Every species has trapped itself into a pattern, and I'm afraid we're too late to save ours. They're wiping out the books and machines, the music and voyages, all delight in the universe except a few itches and spasms—even those won't mean anything with no background, no past, no future. Their Realities leave nothing real."

"We're real," she said. "We'll win, Denisu."

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The simple affirmation somehow swept the clouds from the stars of belief. Yes, they'd win—or die hoping. An over-compensation against the loathed Community formula, "Holyamuh-lahvnarms thrallternty" restrained him from sugar-coating their closeness by crushing her to him. Perhaps he felt the closeness all the more keenly for that self-denial . . .

He was a woman half-way between baby-face bride and hung-chop matron—maybe nineteen. She was unhappy; this was A Diffrunt job, a hard *job. You couldn't follow the pansensor at all: every few minutes, a stretcher came past with a silent form on it; you had to put the limp hand into this finger-print thing, and take the card out.* Then, *just as you got settled down to the Show again, a stretcher came out the* other *door and you had to match the fingerprints. Why couldn't they make a machine that would pick the right card itself and stamp it? This was bother-some—it was* Diffrunt!

Not that she *was fussy. Most girls would feel funny about these people going in to get their brains cut down to natural. She* liked *it. These people were like Bad Guys on the pansensor, like that Diffrunt, proud-acting man in the Show right now, tring to stop the BoyunGirl from being a Dorlncupl, ugh! The faces going in, even doped, looked Diffrunt. They were Rebels, they* wanted *to be Diffrunt, they were against The People. Coming out, they looked Real, almost, their faces happy, smooth.*

Oh goody! A music Show. She relaxed into the familiar yowl of the instruments, the syrupy vibratto or flat straining of the voices . . .

He was a stunted, gnarl-fibred man sitting astride a girder of an unfinished building. His brain was giddy and cheerful with some crude brew and with a reckless enthusiasm that disowned all tradition: The good-old, gut-rotted Tuan had pulled it off with those snotty lily-hands on the Council! Below, a small motorcade of vehicles was crawling like ice-breakers through the roaring throng. As each roar went up, you could almost smell the alcohol on it, and he added his own genial, aromatic bellow. Maybe all Bosses had been The Enemy since history be-

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gan, like the old Green songs said; but Kikije tuan had promised, and he'd done it! Chimborazo and Kilimanjaro free forever, to live their own life and sell their Mars-metal on their own terms to the Rabbits.

New, decent shelters on the moon and Mars. New, fast ships for the transport. And how he *could use the pawky skill he had stored away, to build those! Make the Rabbits* pay *for the ore, and put it into Chimbo. A chance to see Villy grow up straight and full-trained, not a drunken ugly-mug like himself, even to mount into the Hierarchy and work beside those queer, proud, yet dirt-handed tuantoi. Beyond that, a great future that he didn't quite grasp but that glowed through him like the liquor.*

Voices began a song, and he joined in vauntingly:

"Oooooooooo,
I belong ta Chimbo,
An' Chimbo belongs ta me!
Muh name it is Little Joe Lokan,
An' who dares meddle wit' me?"

It was true *now, by Black Space!*

He was a Freeman child, his mind jerry-built from compulsions and obsessions. But a shriveled curiosity stirred now. He watched an old man pack shredded stuff into a tiny bowl with a stick growing out of it, put the stick in his mouth, and set a burning twig to the bowl. He said, mechanically, "Whyadotha'?"

The man emitted bad-smelling steam: "Nev'seenany'n smoke, sonnyboy?"

"Uh-uh. Whyadotha'?"

*"Bettnot tellya, sonnyboy. 'sDiffrunt*now. *Theylet few'fusdo't, webesick'fwestop. TwudnbeReal, 'fItalkbout't."*

"Whyn'evbudydo't?"

*"*sDiff*runt. Takes Lan'tgrowa-tabak. Lan'ottabeMakin*Life. *WunsatabaktookLan, nuffLant'makemillyunLives. WhenIgimmibodybackt'aRace,* al*Lan'makesLife."*

The child returned to sleek-faced vacancy. Of course: that was Real. It disturbed him to think that things had ever been otherwise. Forget it. This was time for his Joy Project. It swept

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his mind clear, whispering, "Don'bela, don'bela!" The past was Diffrunt . . .

He was a big man with a carven face, muscles toughened, skin toughened, mind toughened by mighty struggle. But even the tough mind was sagging now.

He stood by a machine with big, lugged wheels and a primitive straw-alcohol motor, in the middle of a bleak plain broken only by scrub in hollows. A gray light drained the color from everything except an apricot tinge in the northern sky and a weak, yellow glow southwards. Towards that glow, his whole mind was focussed with a hate intensified by helplessness. The City, the cursed City, growing on the work of his *people, like fungus on the ruin of fallen trees!*

Through all history the government had played this double game—using the throw-backs to spread their grip on the land, using the land to weed out the throw-back. You could hold as your own any area you reclaimed, you and your heirs. And so the forlorn hope had gone forth, the men and women who found no fulfilment sitting in the Shows and Assemblies, hands curled in laps and minds washed by tenth-hand experience; who did not care to Serve among the Tuans; the folk whose hands itched to obey their minds in strong, plain things—machines and crops. And the Tuans had benevolently provided tools to shovel the mountains into the lakes, to tame bad-lands, to fertilize sands, to dyke back the sea. Expendable muscle-power had crushed rock, infused bacteria, created loam by the million acres, handful by handful.

Here and there the Crofters had formed pools and pockets, farms, villages, market-towns lasting, sometimes, for centuries —or so tradition said.

But—there was a joker, a rock that blunted every plough: The adolescent children were taken by the Cities for two years to learn sociology, culture. Like drought they were! They were taken to be soaked in the indulgences of the Cities, the endless barren sex, the play that was preparation for no reality. True, most of them came back, scathingly contemptuous; but some always stayed. Of those who stayed, some repented later, sick-

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ened for expansion of their selves into a world of responsive earth and cycling days and seasons. They could return, of course —but their father's heritage was forfeited; they had to start from scratch. Such forfeits were rare but persistent; and they were gone forever. And the pioneer stock was bled slowly, while their offspring was limited by the rigid, universal laws; some were worn out before they could sire heirs; some were killed by the hazards of their rugged life; and that steady trickle was lost to the Cities.

This was the last of so many last frontiers, the Arctic tundra; and the crofter stock would conveniently die out with its subjugation. The Tuans had, oh so benevolently, proclaimed new mutant crops that would provide a living in the brief growing-season. Only a remnant of hardy souls had taken up the offer; but they had sufficed to reclaim toilsomely another strip of crop-land creeping ever more slowly towards the polar sea. Only a skirmishing-line was left now, and already the Cities had come to feed on its work, blast them! Rot them with blight!

Word had come that morning: Yonni wasn't returning from his two-year brainwashing. He had chosen the warm, ten-hour snuggle in his warm chamber, and ambling to a three-hour job where he could watch this new pansensor-thing even while he worked, rather than his sharp-gabled home, and grappling with this hard-built soil, and the winter sports.

The man had wondered why he didn't feel it more when the news came; mother had lamented and puckered up . . . The numbness was wearing off now! As they said it did after you'd been shot. Yonni! Yonni gone over to those slack, pallid insect-things. The rich, brown ploughland that had been created by three generations, and that only needed upkeep now, was a stinging mockery—for them! Rot them! If he could have burned it . . . !

Surely man was small potatoes—and too blighted many to the hill.

Someone had been really intelligent about making the lounge pleasant. The effort seemed rather pathetic now.

It wasn't only that this woman's body was weak and her mind bruised. But even drugs couldn't whitewash the plain, logical

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knowledge that the bravest onset of the human race had collapsed; ardor had been quenched by the bleak deserts of Mars; youth had been starved by the thin, senile atmosphere. And, like a high lament above the muffled drums of communal disaster, her personal tragedy mourned and keened: Josu, the sane, undaunted spirit of the future, dead of the dust-sickness; the baby dead, with three others, when the air-pumps failed.

And now, back to an Earth that would never again provide even the scrapings from the porridge-pot on which the Colony had tried to work this time—tools for manual work, faulty pumps; back, to be swallowed up in the unlovely species that had fed and bred itself to thirty-five billion. This was not retreat; it was surrender.

That knowledge closed around the facile, things-can-still-be-rather-fun illusion of the drugs, as the directionless void closed around the colonist-ship, outside the lounge with its smolder-bright carpet, brackets of flowers, and happy pictures. They'd given the last, twisted-out drop of valor. They'd never even had a chance.

Some had made pacts not to talk about it. But what else was there to talk about? Whether it were better to maintain the League with no future, to see the children slipping away, the elders dropping off one by one? Or to merge voluntarily with the Race that had turned renegade to Life and mind? . . .

They were talking now, one of their endless post-mortems. Xaviu, his black eyes lusterless in his long, sallow face, peddled his theory: "Not resources, not equipment. We're simply senile as a race. A young race might have seen solutions where we never dreamed of looking, attempted what we knew was useless. We're through and we'd better admit it and adjust ourselves to the fact."

Heads nodded in languid assent. Hands carried glasses of consoling brew to slack lips.

One man stood up, middle-sized and ugly—balding, thick-necked, a wide mouth not helped by a stubble of moustache. Yet now he compelled attention as a commonplace chunk of iron gathers magnetic flux, simply because he had stood up,

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forcing action out of inertia. He said, "Seductive theory, Xaviu. But fallacious."

Nobody spoke and he went on deliberately: "The analogy between an individual and a species isn't reliable, you know. Even granting they're both organisms, you can't apply the laws of one to the other, any more than you can the laws of protozoan life to a man."

"So what?" said a girl whose chic dress didn't conceal her premature gauntness.

"Why, this: Evolutionary history abounds in races that looked senile and suddenly burst into flower again—the Chinese, the Anglo-Saxon, the Italian. Cultures grow old, yes. But a race can shake off a culture and emerge again."

"So what?"

"So we can't use analogies to alibi our failure, or a surrender now. We as persons aren't senile. We did *carry out this amazing venture. Maybe we overlooked some tricks, as Xaviu says. But we blighted near* did *pull it off. And as long as* I *see a trick, I'll play it.*

"So now," Xaviu cut in with a sneer, "we go back to Earth and pick up some trick the Three Ages have overlooked, do we?"

"Yes." The word was a hand sweeping aside cobwebs.

A tall, grim, lean-jawed fellow, the type for whom the impossible only takes somewhat longer, demanded, "Weren't you a cook, or something like that?"

"I cooked. I came as a biologist, but there was nothing to work on. So—I cooked. Weren't the meals satisfactory?"

Grim-jaws humanized in a crinkled smile: "They were damn good—after you took over. So you went from biology to cooking—now what?"

"You have time to think, waiting for pots to boil. It seemed to me that if we were strong enough to establish ourselves even temporarily on Mars, we were overlooking a trick the Three Ages had *missed, something easier to reach, something that would act as a booster rocket to give us escape velocity from the World Community."*

"Which is?"

The ugly man stepped to the lounge's scanning-desk which,

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by universal consent, was left blank and shuttered. He snapped back the cover, materialized the familiar, star-powdered gulf, and drew the green spark of Earth towards him in expanding magnification till it quivered bigger than an Autumn moon. He laid a fingernail on a snow-white polar cap. "There," he said.

The rest of the onlookers reacted with grunts or nervous giggles. But the discussion seemed to have concentrated down to the ugly man and the grim one, excluding the others. "That's so," said grim-jaws, "All we'd have needed—if we'd been able to get at it."

"All we do *need, if we make up our minds* to *get at it."*

The non-committal, practical eyes flicked from planet to speaker and back again: "Any suggestions as to how?"

"Only vague ones. But it seemed to me, if we could tunnel on Mars where we don't understand the geology, where our air-pressure was always getting unsealed, where we were at the end of a cobweb from our home base—well, why couldn't we do it there?"

"For a start—yes. We couldn't reclaim the whole continent that way. But . . . there will *be a way . . . if we have to stir up the whole planetary ant-nest. It's the thread of hope that leads on."*

Xaviu sneered wearily: "Once in a lifetime's enough for me. From now on, I'm swimming with the current. What's good enough for nature and the human race is good enough for me."

The cook-biologist swung on him with the new confidence of a man who has discovered he is not alone after all; he said, with a soft fury, "We don't need you, *Xaviu. You and yours can drift with the current.* Life *has always* fought *the current. And, by Toanga, so will we!"*

"Resigning from the human race, eh?" Xaviu jeered.

The cook's wrath faded to a calm smile: "Depends on what you call humanity, Xaviu. To me, humanity means going on and out. It looks like the World Community has resigned, not we. At any rate, the first air-breathers resigned from the majority, so did the first warm-blooded things. And we're going on too, if we're only a dozen."

Grim-jaws laid a minatory hand on Xaviu's shoulder: "And

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be sure you forget about us. Anyone who doesn't won't drift very far."

In the desolate soul of the sick woman, hope stirred as remotely but unquenchably as chestnut buds in February sunlight . . .

He was a young man thickly bundled in heavy clothes, gazing shorewards from the deck of a water-skeet. Under an eerie, bottle-green sky, sweeps of lifeless white washed up to a naked range of mountains; and he knew those mountains had been drawn up by mirage from far below the horizon—Antarctica more lifeless than Mars. "Death, what a place! Millions of square miles, sheer malevolence to life. The end of the world in preview!"

Some theorist who had never seen this beach-head of unlife on Earth, must have dreamed up the nightmare of getting a foothold here . . . Well . . . you had to die sometime. And what dream was left but the nightmare?

He was the same man again, older, harder, bunked up in a metal cavern, on one of a hundred bunks, tier above tier—infinitely more cramped and communal than any Freeman unit. But a quiet triumph soothed his mind: They *were moving in now, the families, in to the endlessly variegated suites he and his mates had carved. No family for him: the pioneering had taken too long, taken too much out of him. But, what the blight! It was* all *his family now.*

It was, he thought, like being a man buried alive in ice, with a tiny heat-element fixed to one finger. You wiggled the finger till you freed the next one: (through his mind flitted pictures of racing sledges, surveying echo-instruments set up in screeching wind and snow, sounding the ice and rock beneath.) Then you freed the hand: (shafts driven under squat derricks, caverns blasted in the ice.) Then you moved your elbow: (tunnels branching through the virgin rock, suites of caves on either side.) Then your whole arm: (five-hundred new workers coming tomorrow, specialists, engineers, cooks, chemists, home-makers, even entertainers doubling in manual or office work.) Soon the

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shoulders would be free, the head; both arms would work freeing trunk and legs; the community would rise up to stand on its own feet, to hew away the imprisoning mass in great chunks: wind-power, tide-power, volcano-power, perhaps even a revival of atomic power for other than interplanetary use, strikes in the unexploited rock. Then the future well launched; young voices in the caverns, young faces bent over the work, young feet racing on the docks of ice-cavern and briskly unloading cargoes to strengthen Toangahela. While the rocket-recoils did their work. His children, who had had no time for children.

"Now let thy servant depart in peace." Well, it had been worth it!

He was a young boy in a slowly-moving throng, drifting past a sort of shrine. A small cascade splashed down from a rift in the rock and wound through brown soil—like a flower-pot only unbelievably much of it. White tree-trunks as thick as his wrist criss-crossed their delicate shafts beside the water. Enough ferns to wade through, if they weren't so precious; behind the trees, in a flood of artificial sun, long grass and golden spikes of flowers spreading away over a hill—like the stories!

He drifted past on a tide of awe, and gratitude, and longing, and pure bliss. Some day . . . some day he would step through the picture-windows into a world, a whole continent, like this! But first, he would have to be very strong and very clever—and very patient.

Twenty lifetimes patient.

Pahad rose out of the dream into himself with a smarting of frustration. Just as the long, mounting drama approached its final climax—down came the curtain.

Jarel smiled mockingly at his evident chagrin: "We haven't written the end of this act yet—the League, and the Community, and the Hierarchy, and—you." He rose, leaving all the implications hanging in the air, and silently ushered Pahad out of the silver cave, past the picture-window of the rocky cove, into the corridor.

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PART 3

RETURN TICKET

This is the way the world begins
This is the way the world begins
This is the way the world begins,
Not with a whimper but a bang.
(apologies to) T. S. ELIOT

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CHAPTER 19

TOMFOOL RIDES AGAIN

He walked all the way home, intending to debate things with himself, but found little to debate: He'd seen the other side of the case; he sympathized with the Rebel effort, up to a point; he'd see that it got a fair show, but would certainly not let it ruin a world, his world, so that it could pick up the wreckage. He couldn't even force himself to realize the immensity of the burden that rested on him; he had a series of simple acts to perform when the time came, and that was that.

He found Benuha waiting for him, as he had half expected, though not with the easy-going patience of the days before his wedding.

Benuha, indeed, spoke almost hastily: "Say, P'ad, how'd you like to try your skiing technique outdoors?"

Pahad had been taking an intensive course of physical training, under Benuha's tutelage, wrestling, running, skiing, and so on. His flight across the polar wastes would require every drop of energy he could accumulate; he'd been eccentrically athletic among the Tuantoi, a giant compared to any Freeman, but among the rebels he was only a bit better than average and his moderate swim in the Lithlua cave had exposed his softness. Also, he'd discovered that Andu was privately toughening his big frame—characteristically by daily mortification with

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weights; Pahad suspected that Andu had said nothing about this in order to steal a march on him.

Now, however, he seized on another aspect of the matter with a pleasure not altogether hypocritical: "You mean *you* are recovered enough to go out again?"

Benuha smiled: "Sure do. 'M afraid my honeymoon'll be over in two or three pentads, and I'll be back in harness."

"Congratulations—uh, if that's what it calls for. So when do we go out?"

"Well, meteorology reports that we're due for a notable calm over the next thirty-six hours, and we may not get another before the Autumn storms close down. In fact, they think this calm's an omen. How about tomorrow morning, tenth hour?"

The date was fixed, and Benuha hurried off. Pahad sat down to read one of Elisi's books. But in the middle of the first page, his subconscious served him up a thunderclap. He snapped the book shut, sat glaring at his revelation for a moment, and called Andu peremptorily.

Twenty minutes later, Andu was confusedly protesting: "But, my dear boy! On such short notice! Do you really think we shouldn't check . . ."

"Check what? We've already checked every detail three times. This may be our last chance for six months. Don't you understand?"

"Well . . . ah . . . yes, quite. But . . . there's only an advance-guard at the Colony yet."

"But nothing. Why do we have to wait for more? If you're afraid, now the crop's ripe, I'll go alone."

He almost hoped Andu would take him up on that. Lack of a companion might complicate things; but on the other hand, if and when he arrived, he would be well rid of Andu's evangelistic rantings which would rock the boat however feebly. Andu, however, evidently was determined to be there with his view of the case; he deplored what little he understood of Pahad's attitude towards the Rebels, as an Ozark Baptist would have deplored the urbane tolerance of a metropolitan bishop. He agreed, reluctantly, almost grimly: but they must sleep first.

The suggestion was probably a straw at which Andu was

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snatching, but it was sound, nevertheless. In a short while the sun would go below the horizon for several hours; a rest was necessary; things had to be done. True, delay would shorten the time before Ben' missed him, but it couldn't be helped; and one could leave some trumped-up excuse—gone to Jarel's, or such—that might put off discovery. Pahad laid down iron-clad specifications for time and place, and went home to salvage what sleep he could.

A few hours later as he reached the derelict corridor where Andu was supposed to be waiting, half of him was toying with a dream of grandeur in which he was wiser than Andu or Jarel and synthesized their half-truths into a sort of World-wide Old University. The other half sat back and smiled sardonically: "Twenty-four hours from now, *you* may be synthesized with bygone things." Nevertheless, he was buoyant.

At the soft pad of his steps, Andu emerged from a store-room door. The man looked bigger than ever in the tight-fitting, black garments that went under a space-suit. Almost, he resembled a great, black bear, as if decision had condensed his foggy benevolence into a strong, harsh liquid.

The change in his companion braced Pahad. This fanatic mood would be more useful out yonder, than platitudinous good intentions—if it lasted. He trod swiftly on the heels of Andu's big strides.

At the end of the corridor, Andu quickly unlocked a door and stooped through. Cold closed around them like icy water and soaked through the black garments that Pahad too was wearing. "We must move fast," Andu muttered, "or these suits won't keep us warm till we get to the armor." He strode on along a tunnel. The bobbing beams of their hand-lights showed streaks on the walls and puddles at the edges of the floor, like candle-grease, as if the passage had been melted through the solid rock by some unknown device. Andu explained, his old drone of didactic apology blending curiously with his new overbearing confidence, "This was a supply-entrance before they opened the sea-gate. It comes out some distance from the coast, because they had to choose a spot where ice-slip was negligible."

Pahad reserved his energies, lest they prove inadequate for

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keeping up with the single-minded giant. The tunnel ran perfectly straight with a steady, tiring, upward slope. But at least each kilometer it covered in this way was one less to negotiate on the dangerous, half-known surface. Then, abruptly, it twisted, as if space itself were distorted. Even Andu, who had seen it all before, halted—perhaps for the pleasure of being instructive. Then Pahad saw that the continuing tunnel was cut through steely ice. The twist was at the joint of rock and ice, a joint marked by a tortured but unbroken hairline decorated here and there by curious, projecting blades and lattices of ice.

Andu ran his lamp around the joint and said, deploringly, "The ice flows away on each side of this point, an ice-shed, you know. I must confess, they picked it well. The passage hasn't been recut in over fifty years, and this is all the slip that has occurred." He touched a projection furtively as if it might be explosive: "You know, glaciers slide on a layer of highly supercooled water kept liquid by the immense pressure. Little fractures here let it spurt out but it froze instantly." He pointed to a canister hung high on the wall: "They could explode that by remote control and fill the tunnel for yards not only with debris, but with deadly bolts of that water." He seemed to relish the idea.

"How far now to the outlet?"

"Ah . . . the ice-cap is about a kilometer and a half thick, and the slope is nearly one in ten. That gives fifteen kilometers, which agrees with my estimates when walking it."

It seemed more like fifty to Pahad, and the floor rolled as if made of wax which had softened, flowed and rehardened. But Andu plodded on as if his strength were fed by some reservoir of exalted fanaticism . . .

They emerged at last in a chamber, lined with alloy, evidently once hemispherical, but now dented in like a ball in the hand of a child-giant—the bunk-house of Pahad's next-to-last neurreson dream! Empty bunks and derelict machinery now had no more life than so many hunks of ice. But the space-armor was there, under a rotting tarpaulin.

They donned it at once, and at once were insulated from the

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vindictive cold by a narrow, but all-sufficing, layer of controlled environment.

Pahad marvelled at the way in which dreams of grandeur had spurred this pottering sentimentalist into dragging such a load of equipment up here, two laborious trips, braving discovery. The man had had to be kicked into the final plunge, though, fanatic or not.

They agreed on a brief rest. They had come a laborious twenty-five kilometers; the tunnel was guarded with automatic, tamper-proof alarms; and their enemies could reach the outer entrance by surface only after hours of prodigious effort. The suits were padded to permit reasonably comfortable sleep. They slept.

Pahad awakened to a heart-jolting, loud buzz, which cut off abruptly. Andu was already on his feet, his glow-lamp lit, glaring at the tunnel entrance, licking his lips. "That was the doorway to the store-room passage opening," he muttered. "They've found out already."

"Maybe not."

"If they enter the tunnel, they'll set off another alarm."

They waited, their breaths visible and audible in the stillness. In less than a minute, a second buzzer rasped.

Andu grimaced with rage and sprang towards an instrument panel, at the tunnel-exit.

Pahad intercepted him, sheathed arm foiling sheathed arm: "Hold on. What's this?"

Andu glared at him. "Strike the first blow against these brigands. Blow that seal between ice and rock and catch some of them—the life-robbers!"

"Is *that* your first step towards reconciliation and compromise?"

The fury died on Andu's face, and benevolence spread over it like a glove. He droned, almost humbly, "Ah . . . true . . . you're right, my dear boy, of course . . . only when I think . . . when I remember . . . it's sometimes hard to wait. But we *must* shut off the pursuit. We mustn't fail now."

"Certainly not. But we needn't blot our record with murder.

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Does that control-board provide communication with the tunnel?"

"Yes. Yes, I believe it does." The voice was an odd blend of sullen and eager. He fumbled with knife-switches and consulted dials. "This will signal them at the entrance down yonder."

Almost at once a face glimmered in the ancient, warped screen above the panel—Benuha, no mistaking that long jaw. But the face was no longer easy-going and friendly; it expressed grim anger very eloquently.

Pahad spoke first, "Ben', go back."

The eyes were unyielding: "Sure enough. And you're coming with us."

"No. We're blowing the ice-seal up the tunnel; I contacted you just to warn you. You can't get through for hours. And you can't catch us on the surface."

"Maybe not. But we're sure going to try."

Andu broke in defiantly: "Try! I've fooled you up to now."

The long face set in contempt. "Not you! We've a record of every time you came up the corridor. We reckoned *you* were too cowardly to take the plunge, so we let you run. We *didn't* know Pahad tuan had thrown in with you; *he* doesn't stamp his feet when he walks." His eyes turned to Pahad, and puckered as if in puzzlement: "You come back, P'ad. You belong here. Let Droopy-drawers go it alone if he dares. You can come back and we'll forget the whole episode, eh?"

The temptation was poignant. Pahad fought back to equilibrium: "I belong in both worlds, Ben'. I'm not going to betray either one. I'm the only man on Earth who can shape a compromise. And that's what I'm going to do."

Benuha's face softened, as oak is softer than granite: "I hope you can, P'ad. But personally, I'll feel safer if we can stop you."

"You have my leave to try." The words were not Andu's taunt but a free challenge that lifted Pahad's own heart. "Now, get back. We're firing the mine."

He let Andu identify and throw the switch. Before they had crossed the dome to the outer exit, they heard the distant rumble of the explosion, felt its buffet.

The dome had been buried under many years' accumulation

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of snow, but Andu had already, on a previous visit, driven a further passage out and up. At its end, digging-tools were thrust into the soft floor, and a few minutes' work burst an opening into the surface air of Antarctica. Bitter as the cold was in the passages, that outer air struck with a more active savagery. Pahad's face felt as if set in a cast of dioxide snow.

He snapped the visor of his helmet shut against that menacing continent, crawled through the last burrow, stood up, and confronted the giant enemy he had next to survive and overcome.

CHAPTER 20

CURST FRIEND, DEAR FOE

Though his helmet was a transparent bulb, he viewed the outer world as a mere neurreson-picture; only himself was real. He stood on a plain between two pink mountain-ranges. Low on the horizon, an ineffectual sun modelled the peaks but showed the plain as a single, smooth curve from range to range—perhaps ten kilometers across, perhaps a hundred. Overhead, a few stars glinted through the violet sky. A lovely, deadly world, biding its time. The burrow by which they had emerged was an incongruous hole burst through from another dimension; Andu was filling it in.

"It might give them a point of reference," Andu's voice explained superfluously, intimate through the helmet microphones.

Pahad felt that any pursuit, ground or air-borne, could sight them from any point within the horizon. But he realized that in their armor, silvered to throw off dangerous radiation, they could probably pass unseen within half a kilometer of their hunters. Even sonar probes were a very feeble threat, hardly able to distinguish them from hummocks.

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They clipped on the broad skis with which the suits were provided, and set off at so easy a clip that he had to curb a feeling of the worst being over. "How far have we to go?" he asked presently.

Andu pointed: "That blue peak just right of the sun is about seventy-five kilometers. That's the pass. Beyond that, it's—hehem—about fifty more to the coast and Colony . . . Never mind the details. I'll show you the landmarks as we approach them, my dear boy. I know them from photographs. The—ah—renegades used the same landing and the pass to bring material to that tunnel before they opened their water-gate."

Pahad, as always, calculated: At their present speed, they might do eighty kilometers a day, and that would make a minimum of two days—if the weather held . . . He experimented with falling behind Andu and found that often at a mere hundred meters, the burly figure, huge in its suit, was invisible. His spirits rose with the glee of a winning player.

They had sped along silently for almost six hours, concentrating on technics of exploiting the terrain, and on their own dreams of the future ahead. Suddenly Andu slackened his pace, and began in his most apologetic tone: "My dear boy, discovery of our plans by that young scoundrel has destroyed our margin of safety. I greatly fear we shall have to have recourse to hua-hua, instead of the rest-intervals we planned."

Pahad had glanced at the same idea. A tube of the potent, and dangerous capsules was part of every Mars-suit kit. "Maybe we shall. But we'd better hold it in reserve. Even if it stretched our day's march to a hundred kilometers, we'd need twenty-four hours' sleep before going on again."

Andu persisted: "We'll have to chance it. They will send a party by skeet to intercept us at the pass, I'm sure."

"Then we're as good as caught, aren't we?"

"Not if we are Guided, dear boy. By your own report, we have little clear weather left. I feel that the Spirit will bring the snow to cloak our passage through and guide us on to the Colony. Don't you?"

Pahad shrugged. They'd have to play it that way, anyhow. But he declined to reinforce the Spirit with dangerous alkaloids

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till abstaining was a greater risk than indulging. Andu agreed, but not cordially enough to mask a certain disappointment. And that set Pahad thinking.

This Spirit-of-the-Race business: It had permeated the era between the Missioners and the Cities, a sort of tame religion, the ultimate in giving you what you thought you wanted without urging you to do what you thought you didn't want to. Since the Cities performed the same functions automatically, nothing but the name survived; all notion of supplication or guidance, revelation or gratitude, had evaporated. Only the usual residue of orgy, the neurreson in this case, still represented worship.

But Andu seemed to take the matter more seriously.

Come to think of it, what would be the effect on the World Community when incomprehensible disaster burst in through the guaranteed order of the universe? If history were any guide, an hysterical revivalism, a caricature of the old religion. And wouldn't Andu be the ideal Man-on-a-white-horse to administer the intoxicant of a new crusade? And didn't Andu know it?

In that case, what price the reconciliation and compromise Andu had been proclaiming? Pahad's jaw set grimly.

An hour later, Andu halted and lifted his bulkily-encased arm. "See there!" his voice hissed in the helmet. Where he pointed, to the right, over the rosy peaks, a solid glint flashed silver, a skeet, the interception-party.

Pahad felt as conspicuous as a walnut in a flour-bin, in spite of a rational assurance that he was indistinguishable among a million folds and hummocks. They wouldn't even be bothering to look for him now; the show-down would come at the pass. Well—he'd expected it. Only, fatigue magnified and distorted the peril.

Andu's voice droned solemn and portentous: "The Spirit set His hand over us, and the Children of Chaos passed us blindly." Then he reverted to a heavy practicality: "And now, my dear boy, I think it is high time we reinforced our energies. We have accomplished sixty kilometers and we must try to accomplish another forty or more before we trust to the cloak of storm that will assuredly be sent."

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Pahad's instinct flared into red-haired contrariness. Andu had some hind-thought in this insistence on hua-hua, and Andu's hind-thoughts should be resisted simply on principle. "Another ten kilometers." Pahad stood pat.

Andu protested: the dose would carry them another thirty kilometers—ten beyond the pass, where they could halt and rest; why postpone it merely to extend the ten to twenty? Pahad was obdurate. Andu gave in. And Pahad wondered rather wearily why Andu hadn't forced the issue by taking a dose himself. He also scored himself off heavily for having left matters of distance and direction to Andu. Every word the man spoke nourished a formless distrust above and beyond the old innate antipathy.

When Andu announced the end of the ten kilometers, Pahad knew that his own instruments recorded only seven. But what the blight! The big goof was tired, and Pahad himself was beaten enough to crave the wizard relief of the stimulant. They should be almost at the pass, supposing Andu's figures did not lie too grossly.

The capsules were layered like an onion; each shell, as it dissolved, provided a booster shot so that narcotization was prolonged over four or five hours. Five minutes after the build-up dose burst over his gastric mucosa, Pahad felt his old self flowing back into his sodden limbs and brain. Everything was Right again: he enjoyed gliding forwards in his magic envelope of warmth, over the delicate white, between the fairy-tale mountains that converged ahead towards the pass of peril and decision.

He could enjoy knowing that below him the corridors and dwellings of the delightful, naughty rebels spread towards the coast—they must if they connected with the tunnels of those amusing animal-things. Maybe he was at this moment passing a few hundred meters over the village square where Elisi's white house stood. And . . . he was on his way to save them from their naughty little selves; and to save the jolly World Community from itself too. As for Andu, he enjoyed a glow of half-affectionate patronage: good old Andu! He, Pahad, could use

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that post-dated Messianic urge, to get things done back home, just as he'd used it to escape from Toangahela and to conduct him across the ice-cap.

But about Andu even the drug didn't quite convince him. He'd been so sure about Karlohu, that that first report about the tides was just a pansensor-dream. About Nada too. About Ruara, long ago. You seemed to learn chiefly by making mistakes. And you *could* say Andu had been using *him*. But for what? To help break through the barrier of physical fear? But then, what use was he to Andu now?

Andu seemed thoroughly exalted. He was muttering and singing tunelessly to himself, sacred songs about 'love'n heavnup-above,' oblivious of the communication between the helmets. Pahad was going to switch off the communicator, and then left it on as a minor nuisance compared to the risk of not having instant team-work if necessary.

The hua-hua induced time-illusions: you could see the sun gliding through a low arc behind the peaks; Achernar, Canopus, and the Cross glinting out, wheeling; sky-colors changing from rose to green to ultramarine to indigo. The kilometers likewise were reeling off briskly.

Suddenly Andu's muttering took on an apparent drift. The drug was wearing off. Already? But, looking back, there *had* been hours of putting one foot ahead of the other. Andu was a bigger man; the booster shots wouldn't prop him up so well; he was sagging and the back-log of fatigue was welling up in his brain. He muttered drunkenly, ". . . uphold my arm and my heart . . . a life . . . no man has taken a life since the Cities were built . . . ah, but no man has borne the terrible burden . . . one life against billions . . . destroy, destroy the traitor . . . raise up the People . . . a million years of brotherhood!"

Pahad went sickly hot. The words fired a mixture that had been floating in his mind, like a spark in mingled hydrogen and oxygen. The question echoed sinisterly: What use was he to Andu now? Answer: None. He had boosted the man's real courage over the hump; and from now on, he was a liability, a menace to the sublime vision that glimmered ahead. He was

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that most dangerous and hated of all pests: the voice of reason. To Andu's mind, there would be only one solution, the ultimate argument of every fanatic—liquidate.

Andu's anxiety to press hua-hua on him, fitted: Andu had started fresh—he had been husbanding himself for pentads—and could hold out till the kick-back of the drug piled itself on Pahad's original lack of rest. Then . . . no need of nasty violence; Andu had had ample time to study these suits, and could bollax one in a dozen ways while you slept—disconnect the heater, plug the air-intake, falsify the gyro-compass.

This realization checked the first wave of exhaustion flooding Pahad's bones. He mentally pummelled himself awake: Fool! He had *known* Andu was obsessed and crafty, and he had naively put himself in Andu's power.

But never mind pointless self-recrimination. What was to be *done*? No hope of outlasting Andu. In addition to calculated advantages, the man had an extra stimulant in his messianic visions; his Spirit was a false god, but it would bluff him through like an intoxicant. While Pahad, he himself realized it bleakly, had nothing to sustain him but the dull bread-and-butter of a common-sense, human mission. His former goddess was a remote vision of sun in green trees, of far-off peace and delicacy; she had lost all substance like last night's dream. And he knew no other power to set against Andu's sublime hallucinations.

Ten minutes later, Andu halted so suddenly that Pahad thought, for a flash, they were about to settle affairs by violence after all. But the killer-messiah only swung a clumsy arm skywards, in his stock ham gesture.

A new Sunrise had been sluggishly developing as the sun slid obliquely behind the rim polewards, meaning that they had been on the road over twenty hours by grace of hua-hua. But now, an unnatural twilight was killing the dawn still-born. The inhuman beauty of sky and hills was being swallowed in a living darkness, a cloak flung across the sky and swirled westwards as it lagged behind the wheel of the expanding latitudes that ringed the pole.

Andu's voice orated thickly: "The shadow of the Race shall cover Its servant. I shall walk unseen through the valley of my

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enemies." (Weren't those quotations from the times of the civil wars when the Poor, Persecuted ancestors of the Freemen had valiantly smothered any horrid group that dared to hold out against them?) "And now, my dear boy," said Andu caressingly, "we must rest before we venture the pass."

An ocean of fatigue bore down on Pahad, and he ached to dismiss his peril as a mere delusion of the fatigue itself. He groggily fought off that desire, and crushed an impulse to launch violence himself. No! He was at every sort of disadvantage and, without decisive weapons or complete surprise, a fight would certainly damage both suits fatally. But a man of Andu's type could be embarrassed by formal accusations. Pahad levelled a charge: "See here, tuanta, those capsules were supposed to carry us ten kilometers *beyond* the pass. You're out on your reckoning. We must have come a hundred kilometers. Where's the pass? How far *have* we to go?"

Andu stammered something about misjudging the strength of the capsules. The pass was ahead, all right. Only a few more kilometers. Rest now.

To relax and rest now would mean surrender to a sleep from which even bodily injury could hardly waken one. Yet Pahad knew, as well as he knew he couldn't jump fifty meters in the air, that he couldn't make it to the pass. He knew also that Andu would outlast him, that fanaticism would hold up the heavier bulk where hua-hua failed.

Memories drove through his mind like the flakes that were beginning to skim past: his skeet tiny above the deserted ocean; farther back, himself flinging defiance to authority in the Convocation Hall; farther back still, his twelve-year-old self uttering his queer little manifesto to the family of his semi-betrothed. He was a man who *had* done things, done them alone.

And now, like yonder molten gleam on a mountain flank, not yet swallowed by the hurtling blackness, he realized it: this time, he was *not* alone. He had had his father before, and the shadowy line back of him into the past. But now he had more, a host from Jarel's visions and yet others sensed behind them, true warriors who had fought without hope. And he, Pahad, was at the prow of the phalanx now . . .

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He said, "No rest. We're going on. This may be our one chance."

Andu blithered: "But—go *on*? But, my dear boy, that's *absurd*. We *can't* go on, not for another kilometer. We'll *have* to sleep."

"We'll take another dose of the drug."

"But," the voice rose to a bleat, "that's *sui*cide! You'll sleep; you'll never wake up. Oh no, oh no."

"You do what you like. I'd as soon die later as here." (Let him chew on that!) "I'm taking another and going on." The suit being slack, he could draw his arm inside and fumble with interior pockets.

Andu grabbed at his elbow but got only the empty sleeve. In the fading starlight, his face inside its dome had lost its crafty confidence, become disorganized under tousled hair. He pled, "But, my dear Pahad tuan, even those violent men—they are constantly *warned* not to do so. They . . . they have a saying: He's had his second shot—meaning that a man is beyond help."

Pahad tossed down the pellet, and watched his enemy with satiric amusement. *Now* who called the tune, Andu's baleful inspiration or the slender fellowship that walked invisible before and behind Pahad?

He could read the emotions chasing each-other through Andu's once unctuous mind. To press on alone leaving Pahad asleep in a crippled suit would have been one thing; to press on alone *after* Pahad, perhaps to have his own murderous game turned on him when he inevitably succumbed, certainly to have his triumph snatched from him if Pahad *did* survive, was something else again.

The glow of returning vitality filled Pahad's arteries. It was not as blithe and jaunty as before, but it would carry him through the pass and some way beyond. How far was the coast now? Fifty-odd kilometers according to Andu. The first capsule had brought them maybe forty. Well, if he collapsed within sight of the goal, at least he'd lost his gamble fighting. He turned and strode on furiously towards the landmark mountain. This was now a dull black, dimmed with snow as the skirmishers of the storm outrode the men struggling onwards below them.

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Andu's voice groaned through the phone, "Wait, wait! I'm coming." He seemed to be fumbling for his own capsules. "My dear boy, wait! We'll get separated."

Pahad slackened speed—he hardly knew why—using the respite to take a mouthful of food-concentrate and a suck of water processed from the snow by a gadget. Food would put off the moment, some place along the trail ahead, when the drug would wring the last flicker from him . . . Andu loomed up, and he struck out again . . .

A few minutes later, and he could see neither the landmark mountain nor the tip of his ski-pole held out ahead of him. The first hard grain of the blizzard, ticking against his helmet, grew to a smother, and the soles of his feet could hear the hiss of a continental surface flowing around and under his skis. Only the ultra-gyro gave direction, and he switched on his sonar that would warn him of any obstacle—though not of crevasses or drop-offs. He acknowledged physical fear. Could these suits, made for desert planets and outer space, survive the fury on man's native Earth? In space no snags would tear fabric or dint metal; on Mars or Moon, no tempests blinded and beat down.

He took a thin satisfaction from the plight of Andu pushing along frantically behind him. Andu was too scared to mutter; only his thick breathing marked his presence.

Nothing, no event, no object, ticked off the passage of time in the white blindness. They might have been fighting it thirty minutes or three hours when the phone crackled, and Benuha's dry voice came through, remote but unmistakable: ". . . Never mind. Keep probing."

An unknown voice retorted, "If we do pick 'em up, then what?"

"Cut them off, with any luck."

"Some luck! Twenty men to patrol three kilometers of blizzard. If we laid bown a needle-beam criss-cross, we'd get them cold."

"Sure we would, dead. Those aren't our orders. Keep probing. They'll have to keep going, but they can't make much progress in *this*." The voices faded.

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Pahad wondered briefly why their enemies would refrain from getting them dead if not alive.

Then his attention was snatched by an apparent chasm falling away at his feet. It angled off in the general direction he wished to follow and he slogged along beside it for some distance before a glimpse of the bottom, only twenty meters down and level as a floor, informed him: *This* was no natural chasm; it was the old ice-canal by which supplies had been run up from the coast. He had read about it: walls and floor of frozen pulp-and-water almost as hard as steel; cleverly laid so that a constant, funneled wind swept it clean and drove sail-sleds. He squatted at the brink and waited till a fleeting gap in the snow-choked air allowed his head-light to strike bottom again. A man-made channel, all right! And going his way.

He traversed down a shallow spot in the embankment, followed by the desperately docile Andu, and struck out again. Going was tremendously faster, and he felt it safe to gamble on there being no hazards. In any case, he cynically let Andu go first, on the principle that Andu was just as expendable for him as he was for Andu.

One obstacle, however, couldn't be warded off in that way. If Benuha knew his job (and he was a type who would) he'd watch the canal particularly; and the canal was only some forty meters across. The voices of the interception-party occasionally came through the headphones in laconic remarks: *that* wasn't so smart of Benuha, anyway, though of course he could assume that his quarry would know he was there, and the signals would give them no direction. Maybe presently it would be best to scramble out and blunder ahead in the open till the voices grew faint again.

Andu's big back, five yards ahead, waxed and waned with the density of the blizzard. A ghastly blue fire glowed around him. At times he seemed to be gliding along four feet in the air, at others, he was weirdly distorted. One distortion persisted, however, an appearance as of small, folded bat-wings on his shoulders; Pahad wondered about them between trying to guess the direction of the voices and struggles to keep upright in the air-torrent. Perhaps a booster-shot of the hua-hua brightened his

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wits at that moment. Helioceptors, of course! Ships maneuvered with them; solar radiation-pressure was almost imperceptible, but added up to a staggering amount in time. They had 'ceptors on suits too, to give a man-overboard some chance of maneuvering to safety. Fan-like things. Useless when greater forces—gravity, wind, even muscles—were in play, of course, even if the sun were shining or . . .

The booster-shot, or something, fulminated an idea in his brain. He had been vaguely wishing for sails such as the old transport-sleds had used. Well . . . ! Sails!

A crazy idea, of course. Probably the tin-thin alloy of the helioceptors wouldn't hold up under the battering of this wind. And if it did, probably he'd be knocked around like a chip in a sluice, be injured. That was a risk. But everything was a risk now. *Not* to try the idea was a risk, and if it worked . . . !

He halted himself by a steep spot in the embankment, and identified the controls; like everything the Brotherhoods designed and used, these were simple and obvious. He spread the fans slightly and gave himself to the wind . . . So far, good! The extra surface only supplemented the pressure on his armor; the acceleration was noticeable but still perfectly manageable. Gingerly, he spread the vanes a little more and a little more. The mounting speed gave a sense of controlled peril—but, controlled. If he accelerated slowly, the strain on the material would be less.

He had no means of judging his speed; snow-devils towered and boiled past him, and the very surface sluiced along, a sheet of driven snow. Till presently he caught up again with Andu (who had not waited for *him*) and had to swerve violently, to avoid crashing him from behind, and again, to veer off the embankment. All right! Let Andu go; let the Rebels catch him and frog-march him back. That would turn the tables prettily.

If only Benuha hadn't thought of stretching a cable across! If he had, probably the suit would keep you from getting killed outright. In that case, they'd pick you up and take you back. For an instant, the prospect was almost alluring: back! to be laid up with maybe a broken leg in sinful luxury, looking over a garden, with Jarel, and Elisi, and Ben' himself to talk to . . .

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Next instant, the snow was pierced by a blurred light, he felt a momentary numbing shock, and was alone in the milky darkness again. A voice blared in his ear-phones, "W*hat* the Space was that?"

Benuha boomed and crackled, "I'll . . . be . . . blighted! Trust that guy to do what nobody else would even *think* of. The devil!"

"But—but *what*?"

"Spread his helioceptors and shot the chute. The neurotaxic beam didn't have time even to stagger him. B-rother, what a stunt!"

"Well, let's get after him before he's gone too far."

"Not a chance, junior. Man on skis can pace a power-sled in this smother even without those sails, and he'll be out of the cutting in another three-four kilometers. We couldn't trace him on the open snow-field."

The voices had sunk to bearable volume as Pahad raced on. A mighty swagger lifted him above his fatigue, above his loneliness, above the culminating perils still ahead. He thought of a childhood pansensor that had buoyed him up for a pentad: the Bad Guy, an ancient warrior armored in metal and riding a powerful animal, had launched his mount under a plunging drop-gate, along a rising draw-bridge, and soared in a desperate leap to the ground beyond.

That warrior had turned then, a blaze of heraldry and steel, and shouted defiance to his dumbfounded foes along the ramparts . . . Pahad knelt and dialled his speaker to full volume: "Can you hear me, Benuha? Come in, Ben'."

A pause; then Benuha's dry-amused voice: "I get you, P'ad. What can I do for you?"

Pahad grinned, getting his breath, folding the helioceptors that would only buffet him around in the lashing gale of the open: "You could give me my bearings for the Colony."

"Same old direct approach, eh? I'm sorry . . ." He whistled abruptly: "Hold on, P'ad. Wasn't old Droopy-drawers with you?"

"He was not." Pahad gave a brief sketch of the situation. "You can have him, for my ration."

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"It's a little too late. He's heard what we said about the helioceptors, and he's just gone past too, like nuts down a chute. Hmh! I guess I'm still not up to cruising-pitch. I'm not being smart on *this* mission."

Pahad quickly scanned the situation. Andu *was* in a frenzy equal to anything now. He told Benuha: "So be smart now. If *he* gets there, and I don't, you can count on no mediation at all. He's sworn destruction of the League. And he's got the bearings and I haven't. I'm due to drop in another couple of hours with a double dose of hua-hua, too."

"A *double* dose? Something's certainly watching over *you*, if you make it. By the Future, P'ad, I'd say you deserved a fighting chance. Hold everything." Connections crackled in Benuha's helmet, his voice said, remotely into another speaker, "Jarel," and followed with a beautifully laconic break-down of the situation. Jarel's voice was too minute for Pahad to hear. But Benuha relayed the answer: "Jarel thinks so too. I'll give you the bearings. But we'll come for you on a sled, and deliver you, if you like."

"No, I'm not going in as your protégé. Anyway, could I trust you, if I went to sleep on you?"

"Hah! Maybe not. We'd *like* you back here, P'ad. But can you make it? It's another ten kilometers."

"Ten! He said *fifty*. Lied about that too. Sure I can make *ten*. Beam me. This suit's got a beam pick-up."

Quiet peeps began in a minute and Benuha promised to stand by till Pahad reached the Colony or succumbed: "If you pass out, we *will* come and fetch you back."

Pahad fought on through the unending violence. Luckily, the wind was still behind him; he couldn't have bucked it. It bullied him but, since its knifing cold couldn't reach him, it had a dream-like quality.

He had lost count of the boosts from his layered capsule; out of the ten due, he estimated that four had hit him before he got clear of the ice-canal—call it five. He kept strict count now, not that it would do him any good—when they ran out, they ran out. With each, the boost was shallower. He could picture the result when they ran out altogether and forsook his body-

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brain metabolism whipped beyond the point of recovery . . .

He lost track of all but three things: the remote motion of his legs; the steady, steadying beep of the beam adjusting his course, like a calm hand through the monotonous yell of the storm; and the comforting, sap-sweet odor of his own fresh sweat inside his thin shell of warmth . . .

Booster seven: If he didn't make it, could Ben' get him home in time to treat the effects of the overdose? He censored an impulse to ask. He drank and ate. The legs moved; sound and scent were drowsy; he jerked himself awake . . . again . . . again . . .

Booster eight: Where was Andu? Was *he* homing on the beam too? You had to give him credit: he fought for his delusions as hard as Pahad fought for the dream of life. Legs . . . beep . . . sweat-scent . . . storm . . . wake . . .

Booster nine—or ten? Benuha had not been talking, so as not to distract him. Now he said, "You're right on top of it, P'ad. Call them on 40,000 kilocycles. And put your own beeper on; they might miss you if you're a hundred meters off, in this smother."

On top of it? The fluid marble of storm within the meter-wide radius of his lamp, was unchanged. Presumably the sun was at low noon, but one might still have been immersed in the dark of a milk-ocean . . . He kept moving . . . moving . . . Suddenly, a blurred, lemon-colored glare, bloomed almost overhead, giving identity to scarves of snow. These no longer streamed horizontal but writhed in tortured violence and the howl of the wind took on fuller orchestration. He blundered into a soft drift, and brought up with his outstretched hands against a vertical surface.

The last booster-shot glowed in him, a sullen ember beginning to die almost at birth . . . Wall . . . the light must mark a gate. He struggled towards it nursing the dregs of consciousness.

A gigantic figure heaved out of the baffled storm . . . Space-helmet . . . Andu. The two confronted each-other, weaving drunkenly. A fugue of nonsense ideas swirled in Pahad's brain, like the snow against the blank wall: kill Andu here . . . no, he'd be found . . . hold him till his drug ran out . . . ha-ha,

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till *whose* drug ran out? . . . In the candle-dim glow of the gate-light, he could read identical thoughts struggling over Andu's all-but unrecognizable, gaping face . . .

A trampling . . . confusion of figures . . . not space-helmets, hoods rimmed with fluff, strange faces . . . hands, tugging, leading . . . low doorway into a cavern of light . . . docile submission of legs and arms while the suit was pulled off him . . . Who were these people? Hard, set faces, cropped heads, curious, sepia coveralls, an orange P on the left shoulder —of course, Patrollers, first he'd seen!

But through it all, perfectly coherent, an indigo disappointment loomed: the effort, the peril, the triumph, the incredible geste performed—all to end like this, monitored in by Ben', still in deadlock with his master enemy, the struggle going on down an interminable vista, this moment merely a fuel-stop.

He saw the figure of Andu, grotesque in its black space-underwear, tottering free among the tight-shut faces of the Patrollers. Andu raised his arm in what was evidently intended to be an historic gesture and began to speak; but all he said was, "Ababa-boobuh, a-gawh, magooh," and slumped heavily to the floor. They carried him out. But Pahad, mind over matter, mind over brain, stalked after on his own alien legs with a chill, sour pride, to a destination he never remembered reaching.

That childish crumb of triumph anyway!

CHAPTER 21

THE CURSE OF AN ANSWERED PRAYER

No further triumph followed.

He fought his way grimly out of the post-hua-hua reaction. The Patrollers proved to be competent nurses even though im-

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personal as insects; but the power that clinched his recovery was his determination to defeat Andu.

At the end of a pentad it was still considered unsafe to move him and Andu to a more civilized spot, but Tuantoi-tan from the World Council arrived to interview them. Before the first interview was over, Pahad knew, behind all argument and all determination, that no matter what victories he had won, or would win, he was defeated. Defeated by the comic conspirator, without a struggle.

Andu, largely restored from the dishevelled madman of the frozen waste, to his unctuous, benign self, was as much in his element as a Freeman in Assembly. His drooping voice issuing from his bulky frame was ludicrous, so was his round, mild face shining with perfervid dedication. Not so, the spirit that breathed from him; slack and tepid as it might be, it *was* a wind in a world of flat calm. His evangelistic instincts had been doomed to exhorting children along deep-grooved channels; now he had a world to rouse for a holy war of overwhelming righteousness. With flawless instinct he played on the horror, raw fear, morbid curiosity, and shallow resolution of his hearers. No more talk of reconciliation with erring brothers; he preached utter obliteration of Toangahela, or unconditional surrender, and swept his audience with him. It was the ancient spirit of mass hysteria awake unimpaired after millennia of sleep.

Pahad struck back with all his force, pled the expanding future to be gained by alliance with the rebels, the peril of grappling with their unknown powers . . . He learned, with saturnine amusement, how Andu must have felt among the rebels —like a man trying to shout in a vacuum. They let him urge his case, but they didn't even answer him; instead, they went ahead with the obvious, natural course laid down by Andu: Rally the Race to obliterate Toangahela.

Besides, his sword-arm was hampered, his objectives confused: back in the swarming corridors, where Freeman, Patrol, and Tuantoi life was curiously mingled, ancient training reasserted itself with iron grip. Ancient habits, automatic reactions and responses, tripped him up.

Presently, too, interrogation opened a wound that he had

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tried to disregard—his first dealings with the rebels at the University: The panel of three faces was friendly but supercilious and dry. They pressed him: Yes, he had had a warning note. No, it had fallen to powder. Yes, it had implied that Avor's death was by foul means. No, the voicegraph had not resembled Nada's. No, he hardly thought she had carried out the murder herself. With tuantath rank she was probably their master-agent at the University, with subordinates to carry out her orders. No, he had no idea of who the subordinates might have been . . .

During the past days he had further developed towards Nada that uneasy shame of a child who has wantonly destroyed something innocent and kindly. He *had* tried to exploit her liking for him; and she *had* saved his life. Now he was forced to recognize again that she was simply a ruthless instrument of a ruthless conspiracy. And all the pleasant dealings of the Rebels with him were blandishments of the same quality.

He tried to muster his resentment against her for her unjust judgment on him. It was as thin as gruel.

In his cubicle trying to sleep, in corridor and refectory, he moved with an indifferent emptiness. He looked blankly at the troops of young hastening decorously to and from the same Projects they would have been subjected to in mid-Europe or America, the adolescents reacting to each-other with the mindless impulse of spawning fish, the shifts of adults hastening back to their pansensors—all on the brink of the polar fury, under the ramparts of their new great enemy. Why struggle for the Great Simplicities if one couldn't enjoy them *now*?

The Junior Library with its bronze plaque, though only a few kilometers away, was inaccessible through walls and storm, ice and rock; and it was, he knew it now, the bright flower of a poisonous root. The two worlds could never be reconciled.

At least, the University was safe; they couldn't deny him that! Weary of body and weary of soul, he lived on for the day when he could turn his wanderings back to their beginning. Meanwhile, all time was compressed into one vague day.

Presently a call came for Andu to report in person to the World Council-hall in the Hindu Kush. Pahad Konor was to remain at the outpost as Special Advisor, with provisional rank

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of tuantatha. His protests and formal applications were brushed aside negligently.

His Special Advice was, of course, never called on. Except for minor deferences, he was in every sense a prisoner, infinitely more a prisoner than he had been in Toangahela, since his jail was not a vital, if evil, world to be explored but an all-too-familiar cell. The only interest left him was to join in the feverish preoccupation with World Mobilization.

The literally disinherited outcasts of the Patrol had, overnight, become the vanguard of the Race. Andu's all-fatherly face and admonitory voice announced to the world by pansensor that young men and women should postpone their Marital Rights for a year to join its ranks—the sterilization requisite was abolished. The response was startling and, in a sense, reassuring; given a pretext and Social Approbation, a certain leavening of the Race was still willing to try adventure. Live pansensor broadcasts showed helmeted squares breaking into swarms working at incomprehensible tasks, strange vehicles, armadas a-building. In less than twenty pentads, an assault on the Observatories was announced. Pahad went to watch it in the Assembly-Hall.

He noted with grim satisfaction that, for once, the pansensor was not providing its audience with an escape from themselves but with a reminder of the real world in which they lived. His own aliveness was uncomfortable as it sometimes was on sleepless nights.

Music, intended to be reassuring, mooed on till suddenly it was cut off and the audience fell silent as if by the same switch. Then the projection took hold. Ninety-nine percent, probably, of Earth's billions began to see with the same lenses, hear with the same microphones, feel with the same electromedullograph tuned to the broadcaster's spinal cord and brain-stem. Compared to a program broadcast, the effect was almost as crisp and intimate as Jarel's neurresons: Pahad felt himself no longer cross-legged on the Assembly divan-bench, but standing in the parachute-bay of a Service Skeet.

He remembered vividly his own tiny foray across the Atlantic, when he realized that this skeet, in which the broadcaster was

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riding, was aimed for Kilimanjaro. He could see her consorts dipping and swaying offside, with no other apparent motion. Then the mountain broke through cloud and mist, gigantic, threatening, exhaling a somber banner of smoke. Motion became vertiginous.

After the first flurry of physical, combative excitement, he grew coolly alert. The squadron was coming in from the East—over the Reservation, then. But . . . were the Brotherhoods, those keen, bronze and copper people submitting tamely to invasion and suppression without launching a single battle-skeet?

And why, he wondered abruptly, *was* the mountain smoking? Some controlled eruption waiting to be used as a super-weapon?

Formidably-equipped Patrollers were lining up for a chute-drop. Their faces were strapped in helmets that recalled antique eras of romantic violence. But the faces themselves were hard and matter-of-fact; any one of them might have been either ex-male or ex-female.

Time lost its continuity: lurch and orgasmic spasm of launching into empty air, body-stretching updrag of the opening chute, sway of fall through the mist, the Observatory swimming up through thinning vapors to catch them . . . A landing-strip, maybe the one that had flagged down his little skeet. The paratroopers racing to pre-arranged stations as they landed, like parts of a puzzle miraculously assembling itself. Not a flicker of life from the mist-shrouded buildings . . . Transport skeets tobogganed in under cover of the advance guard. The pattern of occupation spread planfully, as trotting, helmeted squads leap-frogged, securing positions to pin down further objectives. The broadcaster and his billion-fold doubles moved with them . . . Ramps, entrances were covered and penetrated, dim corridors, laboratories, all empty and echoing. Everything was in precise order, *not* as if the occupants would be back any moment. To Pahad the silence was more ominous than any blaze of counter-attack . . . View from a high terrace over the mist-filled gulf eastwards; but not a sign of the Brotherhoods. The banner of smoke . . .

Briefly, Pahad understood that smoke: Not a menace. Merely the old mountain relieved of its duties as a power-house.

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Now the main assembly-hall and the leader of the task-force on the platform, facing the world. He spoke curtly, impassive as an annunciator system: "We have occupied Kilimanjaro without encountering resistance. Word has just come that Chimborazo also has fallen without incident. The enemy has withdrawn before our show of force."

Drifting out with the throng, amid a surf of jubilant self-congratulation over the model victory, Pahad was uneasy underneath his listlessness. He knew, with the assurance of an adult in an Infant Project, that this had been no victory. The World Community was unable to comprehend a strategic withdrawal. These outposts had been untenable, but Antarctica was the vastest fortress of history, a continent armored in mile-thick ice. Even the Tuantoi, however, fancied that five million Rebels, ingenious, resolute, and virile, had retreated in consternation like a drove of Freemen before Public Disapproval.

Not so the professional Patrollers. The commander of the task force had told that much, to any who cared to hear, by his blank tone and his grim omissions: not a prisoner captured, not even a significant piece of apparatus, nothing but the standard Observatory equipment left with a gesture: "Here's your blighted property." The withdrawal had been carried out contemptuously, coolly.

But in refectory, general interest had switched back to normal, healthy concern over the culminating games in the annual battle for world saro-ball supremacy—a thousand years ago.

A man slipped into the seat beside Pahad, disregarded till he cleared his throat and began, "I don't suppose you remember me, tuantatha."

Pahad glanced, then alerted slightly. He did remember the fellow, very well: old Avor's former assistant, the portly, mongoloid man who had been unable to find the dioxide records. Here at last was a contact with the University, even if not a very warm one. He submitted to the man's prattle, waiting for an opportunity to broach the desired topic.

There was, it seemed, from the stream of tuantoi-class gossip, a most important result to be expected from the forthcoming annexation of Antarctica: it would put off, for another five-hun-

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dred years, the movement for abolishing the Hierarchy altogether. That had been one of Ruara's dreams: merge the tuantoi in the Freeman community, and apply their all-but wasted expenses to making ten dear Freemen grow where one tuanto had grown before. "We'll need Hierarchs for a long time now," Pahad's informant prophesied grimly, "to open up the continent, you know, and to avert the bad results that would have happened if those people had done it their way—tides and all that. It's a good thing too. I don't think it would be wise, do you, to have *no* differences anywhere?"

Pahad twisted the lead to his purposes: "At least we'd always have one difference. The Old University is to be preserved forever."

The man's square-cut face sagged incredulously: "Oh, but—but tuantatha—didn't you *know*? Didn't they *tell* you? They've al*ready* Rationalized the University. A great pity, *I* felt. Of course the crop-cover is very pretty, and when the new trees are grown . . ." he chattered on, half regret, half enthusiasm.

When one is struck by a high-velocity bullet, it is said, one feels nothing for some time but a jar and a puzzled knowledge that he *should* be devastatingly hurt . . . Pahad believed the man's story with all his deepest mind; it was so utterly what might have been expected. His only mental reaction was a picture: a tiny skeet voyaging high against sea-clouds, but now with no shore ahead, to be lost at last in the kindly infinities of ocean and wind. In the world, in the universe, he was homeless.

He finished his bread and plankton-broth automatically, shook himself free from the still-fluent bearer of tidings, and set off for the solitude of his room.

But, at the refectory door, he was halted by a messenger; "Pahad tuantatha Konor, report immediately to the Governor Tuantoi-tan."

The Governor, a philanthropist with the style and appearance of an ancient Caesar, wasted no time in bogus civilities: "Tuantatha, our Patrol Commander for the Colony was much interested in your tale of a tunnel opening on the coast. Could you locate that tunnel from the outside?"

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Pahad slammed a mental door shut: Whatever his future, he would raise no finger more to help the World Community. And he cursed his naive candor during the first few days of interrogation. "I doubt very much that I could, tuantoi-tan. It might be fifty kilometers in either direction on a very broken coast, and it is certainly well concealed."

"Did you see nothing that might serve as a landmark?"

"Only drifting bergs and ice." He vindictively omitted the bay of open water melted by the hot spring. "Besides, even if we discovered it, we'd have no possible chance of using it—it would be a pure trap for any hostile party entering it."

"No doubt. But the Patrol wants you to attempt locating it. I am putting you in charge of an aerial party to survey the coast —*if* you will be so kind, tuantatha."

For the next three days, Pahad was too busy arranging his 'aerial party,' to brood. His first need was to avoid any suspicion of disloyalty, even as he made sure that the expedition failed.

At the first break in the weather, the party assembled in the skeet-hanger. Not Pahad but his nominal second-in-command (and actual master of hounds), a big tuanto-turned-Patroller, Tetehua tuantath, checked crew and equipment; the man had the hard eyes and profile of a robber baron—odd how types lingered down the ages under various disguises, when not mashed into the common Freeman mud.

As he idled, trying to look as if he were in charge of things, Pahad's eye wandered—and checked. That woman entering the hangar, with demure face and mincing step, that woman was Ruara! She walked over to Tetehua with the air of knowing exactly what she was doing, spoke, smiled the pallid little smile that covered her whole gamut of emotions, and stood aside. In a moment, she saw Pahad and smiled again perfunctorily.

He had no real desire to speak to her, but she did offer a relief from his humiliating inactivity. He moved the few steps between them, and said, "When did you arrive here?"

"Just yesterday. I thought this expedition would give me a chance to see a lot of things. I'm an attaché for the World Council, now, you know."

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He could well believe it. Like Andu's, her thin zealotry would take her far in that stagnating system. Her smile continued to say things: You see? I'm getting *my* way without any fuss. And *you're* actually helping me. So much for you and the 'things you love.' She added aloud: "After all, it does pay to know the *right* people—and listen to gossip, doesn't it?"

Tetehua's summons to embark spared him the need of replying.

A Freeman technician, trained for flying and tuanto speech, handled the skeet. The observation party played games or watched pansensor to while away the tedium. Pahad stood in an observation-bay, and looked down fascinated by the gliding view.

The Spring sun (an Autumn sun in that hemisphere) skimmed the horizon, and made everything smoky rose with gray-green shadows. On the left, shelf-ice ran to the curve of horizon, level, dead, and meaningless; rosy glow and all, it made him think of the World Community. On the right, shore rocks smoldered in the interminable sunset, first-fruits of the emerging continent.

He wandered into a day-dream of that continent's possible future history, of the legends that might gather about those unnamed mountains, of nations and races, of seamen voyaging to trade with the sister realms of Greenland and Baffin, of new arts, new sciences opening the galaxy, new philosophies opening vaster and lovelier universes . . .

He was startled by the shout of some kibitzer who had drifted from the mesmerism of the game to attend an instrument. A rush of novelty-seekers tilted the skeet perilously. But Tetehua, with more presence of mind, adjusted the short-range magnifying screen. It revealed a channel in the ice, twenty meters wide, with ten-meter sheer walls; a bevy of seed-shaped objects moved along it. "By the Spirit!" Tetehua announced, "it's Pahad tuantatha's animals! Pilot! Take us down to fifty over that break in the ice. We'll get a close look."

"I'd heard about those animals," said Ruara softly. "I don't

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see why we shouldn't take back some specimens, and exterminate the rest."

With startling alacrity, everyone turned to the rack of weapons that had been provided against emergency in this untamed land, rifle-sized sting-throwers and sonic-needle projectors. Pahad seized a projector, to keep it out of other hands. He was paralyzed by a dilemma: a frantic urge to stop the murder, and a knowledge that the Lithlua, if spared, would lead them to the hidden entrance. He watched in sick fury as the skeet coasted silently in for the kill, and the Lithlua frolicked and surged through the water below unmindful of the sky. The weapons were almost self-directing. But in totally inexperienced hands, the first volley failed. And the Lithlua dived.

Tetehua said commandingly, "All right. Stand back, please, and don't jostle me. I can handle this sonic gun. They'll have to come up for air and I'll get one. We don't need to finish off the whole lot this time."

Ruara interposed imperiously, "Why not? They're parasites and vermin. Why should we let them steal Our Children's food another day?"

Tetehua shrugged, scanning the water: "No hurry. Amusing things. We want to study them, or at least get some fun from hunting them."

Truly, the cruel have slain their millions but the meek their tens of millions! Pahad remembered flamelight in the home-caves, the husky voices, the vistas of the unknown like enchanted forests of his beloved legends, the patient research that had created them, and Elisi's rapturous discovery of meaning in life through them.

In his mind echoed a soft dirge—waves on far-away rocks, wind in vanished forests, whisper of wild-flowers on hillsides now rationalized—a dirge for all the bright eyes and sprightly bodies, swift wings and nimble wits, questing minds and manifold potentialities swept into oblivion. The slaughterers for meat and fur, the ritual hunters of civilization, even meddling fools, had been less deadly than gentle, domestic man when he grudged the crumbs from his table. The world was a drabber place now without its myriad insects and furry vermin. And gen-

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tle, domestic man was eager to remedy any flaw in the drabness.

"They're coming up!" said someone gleefully—a thousand years had not bred out the killing instinct. Tetehua levelled his weapon.

Pahad felt a choking in his larynx . . .

The skeet veered, throwing him against his neighbor.

Tetehua staggered, shouted, "Blight it! What's wrong, pilot?"

But the skeet swayed down like a falling leaf and glided to a stop on the ice. Everyone crowded towards the pilot's cabin, blocking Tetehua and Pahad; but they all gave back when the Freeman burst out. He was light-built, bony-faced, but he daunted even Tetehua who was half his weight again. "Wrong?" he panted in stilted tuanto-Polynesian, "Nothing is wrong except I just do not like it, see? . . . We are goin' to let them alone, see? . . . What right we got to bust them up? . . . *They* got a right! . . . I got a right too! . . . Who says I gotta be like everybody? . . . Who says my kids gotta be like everybody? . . . I quit, I resign! . . . I *wanna* mean something Diffrunt . . . You are not gonna bust up them things just so you can make more people like I have hadda be . . . Let'em *be* Diffrunt . . ." He paused, sobbing.

Pahad recognized the hopelessness of abetting this rebellion now, and the need to prove his own militant virtue for future reference. He swallowed words of encouragement and stepped forwards to lay a hand on the man's shoulder: "All right, Freeman. They're safe now. You just sit down, because I think you're not feeling very well. I'll drive the skeet back."

The man's arm dropped: "O-kay, o-kay. I know when I am beaten. Only," he threw back his head, "there are fifty billion people, and *I* have done something none of *them* ever did. You cannot change that."

"No," thought Pahad, "and I'll tell you what I think of it some day—brother." He ushered him into the cabin, but took the pilot-seat himself.

Before he took off, he made precise position-readings and planted them deep into his brain. With them, he could find the spot again at Antarctic midnight, with a blizzard blowing. The thought was fantastically sweet and bitter: "If it weren't for

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that dozen fanatics with arms in their hands, back there, I wouldn't *have* to find it again. I could go back now, this very hour! But—*would* I?"

If he were forced to choose between two worlds of ruthless murderers, he would at least choose the one that didn't select its victims from the pitifully few things he loved. Actually, he chose neither. Guiding the survey-skeet back to the Colony, he was more utterly alone than on his long-ago Atlantic crossing.

CHAPTER 22

THE MICE AND THE LION

Ironically, an exaggerated report of how he had subdued the mad mutineer did more for his prestige than his escape over the frozen wilderness and his courtesy tuantatha-ship. His request for a nominal sick-leave—room-rest and service—because of fatigue, was granted effusively.

His cubicle provided little room for pacing, but pace he did, like some wretched laboratory animal in its cage. His life had been a mounting struggle, broken only by the long interlude of the Old University. Often he had felt dry-eyed rage; now, for the first time, he melted into warm, bottomless tears—for himself defeated and caged, for April forlorn, for the bright, misguided venture of the Rebels doomed to obliteration, for the whole gallant tale of life now to be heired—League, Lithlua, and the Hierarchy too—by mindless, faceless insects, a mere chemical ferment, down to the death of Earth.

A knock on the door intruded on his mourning.

His face and heart hardened. Bad luck to anyone who came to harass him in his bereavement. He shouted grimly, "Come!"

The door opened hesitantly, and the mongoloid bearer-of-tidings, Avor's former aide, stood dismayed by the ferocity of Pahad's glare.

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With a forced courtesy, Pahad suppressed his exasperation, and motioned the man in and to a seat. "What can I do for you, tuanta?"

The man sat nervously on the edge of the chair: "You can hear me with patience, tuantatha. I must tell you something, a confession."

A wild flame leaped in Pahad's heart. Maybe the fellow's report of the ravished University had been a lie, planted for some devious purpose of Ruara's. The flame died for lack of any possible fuel. "Proceed, tuanta. You have my patience."

The man plunged: "I did you a very ill service once, tuantatha. It was under orders, but it has always troubled me."

Unquenchable human curiosity stirred Pahad in his desolation.

"Seeing you the other day, and your kind condescension, made me realize that you were not a man to be rancorous. And your present high rank means that the episode doesn't matter now—except to me."

Pahad choked back an irritable urge to prod the man on.

"Of course you remember Avor tuantatha, and his untimely death. Ah yes! Only I, and his physicians of course, knew that he was a doomed man, liable to drop as he did at any moment. Strange, strange that our great science has been unable to eradicate such flaws in the human organism."

"Well?" (Was *this* fellow an agent of the Rebel League?)

"Ah, yes. Well, you see, tuantatha, being in his confidence, it was very . . . mortifying, but . . . you see, *you* were not supposed to receive the information he had. And I was . . . told to prevent it. So, you see . . . I did. I purloined and destroyed the papers."

Pahad felt a foundation-block of his world shifting, and the whole superstructure with it. "Told? By whom?"

"Why . . . by the Tuantoi-tan. Who else?"

Pahad rose and stood over him, fists clenched at his sides: "You *swear* that is the truth?"

The man nodded, his hang-chop face, miserable and apprehensive: "Yes. And the worst of it was, that when I came for the papers . . . I found him dead. He was my . . . my only

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friend. And I had to go through with my theft. I even had to feel thankful that now the loss might be covered by the following confusion."

In Pahad's mind, a single word spoke itself clear and deep: "Nada!" In the serried equations of his world, one symbol was reversed from negative to positive, and the whole dislocated complex fell sweetly into pattern.

Now, get this fellow out fast. "I see," he said gravely. "Well, that does clear up a mystery. But, as you say, it doesn't matter now. In fact, that information you removed would actually have misled me. So you see, you really did me a favor." And he eased his visitor out the door with repeated assurances of complete and final forgiveness, even gratitude.

Alone, he swiftly tested the new picture. It held up in every detail. The Tuantoi-tan, not the League, would be alarmed at his apparent solution of his problems by the carbon-dioxide theory—however they knew about it. Nada simply knew of Avor's death, and had used it cleverly—to shield her world, and the future of mankind, to shield Pahad himself from her more relentless colleagues . . .

Even the determination of the latter to liquidate him or erase his mind was not merely comprehensible now; it was the only possible thing they could have done, the thing he would instantly have done in their place, to save the budding life of Toangahela. The tiny kernel of frigid hate that had condensed around his belief in Nada's guilt and had numbed some connection in his brain, melted to a trembling drop in which he saw mirrored a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Nada! She was no longer the egg-shell Island doll, conventionally unconventional, scheming in the immemorial, monotonous way to annex a chosen man; she was a swift, brilliant firebird among the trees and grass of the Old University, leading him on by her very deceptions to splendid perils. Nada no longer the man-trap but the fellow rebel. Jarel, not the tempting Lucifer but the comrade-in-arms and -wisdom. Elisi, the child not of doomed folly but of reaching dream. Benuha, not the good-humored jailer but the trusted friend.

And last, wonder dawned. April lay, not behind him dead and

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deflowered, but forwards in the sunlit caverns, in the splendid future. All along she had been there pleading to his deafened ears.

His top-heavy world had reversed itself.

He had envied Andu the intoxication of false gods. Now his own exiled gods had risen star-high. The future *would* go on. And he with it.

And first he was going back to his own people.

He was going home.

The very jeopardy of his situation roused his spirits. Eluding this all-devouring Community, completing his battle with the deathly polar world on the return lap of what he now saw as a single round trip, challenged his faith in his vitalized gods.

But already a plan was forming in his head, so logical that he thought, with a grimace, of Andu's Destiny, so pat that, though swiftness was essential, he distrusted his inspiration enough to sleep on it.

Morning, however, revealed no flaw, and he set things in motion.

Keying his movements with his normal, expected routine, he presented himself at the Information Desk at an hour when the she-Freeman on duty was known to him. She had, indeed, the hood of frazzled hair, mess of permanent cosmetic, and stunted but overblown figure that was the ideal of Perfect Womanhood. But education for the Colony had brought out a latent, if anemic, personality that made her at least recognizable to a close observer. And she had risen above normal torpor to a degree of intelligence where gullibility was possible.

She and her office boy, with their arms around each-other, of course, were stolidly watching a saro-game—the perfection of Freeman bliss. But both were more than willing to transfer attention to the great Pahad tuantatha Konor, Hero of the Freeman; and they thrilled when he presently turned the talk to the horrrrible lunatic he had subdued. "Oh yes!" the girl informed him in stilted tuantoese, "*He* is in unit 3M, section 74." She proudly showed him that she could locate it on a floor-plan.

He played without scruple on her pansensor-built delusions.

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The fact that his efforts were unpracticed and crude made them just right for her consumption. She had been selected for the Colony because of an abortive willingness to be Diffrunt—up to a point; now this was inflamed to a picture of herself ensnaring a popular hero and attaining tuantoi status with all its food and child privileges. All the labor of learning how to read floor-plans and talk tuanto, so she could come here and be allowed three children, was going to pay off even more fabulously without her having to learn a single thing more! Pahad, queasy but unflinching, dredged up from memory the Freeman looks and phrases implying coy but tender passion.

A wish on his part to see his captive madman, seemed natural to girl and boifren'. Nor were they surprised that he knew of a pass counter-signed by the Governor, left at the desk, and not yet picked up by its intended owner. Under his patient coaching, the girl dug it out and filled it in to his tailor-made requirements, with the official rubber stamps. He left her wallowing in luscious dreams.

He had to act now so that either his plan would have worked, or have failed anyway, before his theft of the pass was discovered.

Minutes later, he stepped into unit 3M, section 74.

The occupant was paying no attention to the pansensor, of which even criminals were not inhumanely deprived, but was sitting on the bunk, lean face propped on lean arms. He looked up with undefeated resignation as Pahad entered.

Pahad sat down on the bunk, since there was no other seat, which made things chummy.

The prisoner said nothing, so Pahad began abruptly: "What are your sentiments now, Jimhu?"

"Why should I change? You can say I am crazy and change my brain. But it does not matter what a changed brain thinks; that is just what *you* and all the billions think, stuck on me like a blindfold. You cannot change what *I* think, tuantatha."

Pahad grinned gleefully inside: "You still want to resign? You'd really join the Rebels if you could?"

"Sure, if they are like what they sound like. What is it to you?

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Go ahead and change my brain. Then you will not have to ask what I think."

"What *do* the rebels sound like to you?"

"You ought to know more about them than I do. You were spying right among them. You tell me, huh?"

"All right, I will. You want to *mean* something. So do they; they want to see beauty no man has ever seen, and perform feats no man has ever dared, and know deeper than man has even dreamed. They have all the things you *imagine* you have—home, and love, and young, and working together, and sport, and leisure, and foolishness. But for them, those things *mean* something because they are the masters of them not the prisoners. They make their love, and work, and play parts of something real that will never die, that will grow beyond the stars. They live."

A terse silence. Then: "So why have *you* not joined them, if you think they're so wonderful?"

"I have. I was a Freeman like you. I rebelled like you. I am a Rebel."

"You—uh? Then what're you doing here, counter-spying?"

"Never mind that now. The point is, I'm going back. And I've got to have your help."

"*My* help? That's good! Maybe you hadn't noticed. I'm locked up."

"All right, I'll unlock you. Is it a deal?"

Pahad's plan, explained to Jimhu, was desperately simple: seize a skeet and fly it back to the cave entrance, swim in and walk down the tunnel till they met somebody, man or Lithlua. Only, you didn't take skeets just like that, not because skeet-flying in itself was frowned on, but because fuel was controlled almost religiously. To get away with it, he would have to know the ropes so well that he could bluff his way through and be gone before anyone smelled fish in the porridge.

Jimhu promptly demonstrated his value: "We cannot bluff, tuantatha. Things are too well controlled in the hangar. We must raid the hangar at night. There are only two men on duty

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and a big guy like you could jump them easy. I can show you the way and open the doors."

Pahad agreed, but decided they should wait twenty-four hours to think things over. Not because of qualms: This violent act would once have been an unthinkable crime not only against individuals, but against the Race—matricide, obscenity, blasphemy. At the moment, he *longed* to commit a crime against the Race, several crimes. The delay was only for sober inspection of plans.

But at the door of his unit, returning from this first step, he found waiting a courier with a sealed wafer for him, 'acknowledgement requested': "Prepare to report to World Council within twelve hours of voice-receipt for this summons. Andu tuantoi-tan Rameha, Special Adviser."

A dagger of excitement leaped in his throat as he closed his door. He could have no doubt about either Andu's or the Council's attitude to him, the advocate of compromise. Lucky that he'd already begun to act! He'd have plenty to do in that twelve-hour margin between triumph and ruin.

No time for meditation, anyhow. He thought swiftly: He'd play jiu-jitsu with this attempt to throttle him. By communicator, he fought through piece-meal officials to the one he wanted. Flashing his summons with the signature of Andu and the Council seal, he said brusquely: "Deliver the space-suits in which Andu tuantoi-tan, and I, escaped—to my unit immediately." His momentary prestige, backed by the wafer, carried the bluff. The suits arrived in half an hour.

Fortunately, each suit was equipped with repair-adjustment kit, and adjustments were of elementary simplicity. He scaled one suit down to the slight proportions of Jimhu.

It was technically night when he arrived back at the detention-corridor and again flashed his pass fortified by his summons with the awesome signature and seal: "I'm to deliver this fellow to the Tuantoi-tan."

"If anyone can, you can, tuantatha," said the tu-rank orderly reverently.

"I'll need a sonic needle, just in case. Have you a spare?"

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"No, tuantatha, but take mine. I won't need it when he's gone."

Pahad thanked Fortune that the Colony necessarily included both restive Freemen and the docile tuantoi. They provided just the range of intelligence suited to his operations.

Jimhu was asleep, crumpled ungracefully on his bunk as if he had died by violence; but his face was dignified and contented.

Pahad shook him by the shoulder, not too gently, for the orderly's benefit: "Wake up. Get up. You're coming with me."

Jimhu played along commendably, preceding Pahad with a hang-dog swagger. Pahad followed, his needle-projector very much in evidence. They took back-corridors, meeting only a few citizens; these gaped, but found it natural that the great Pahad tuantatha should be convoying his own prisoner.

In Pahad's unit, as they donned the suits, they determined on the safest route to the hangars. "And from the moment we leave this room," said Pahad, "we keep moving. If people think we know what we're doing, they'll be less likely to bother us; but the place is full of grade-hunters and one of them is likely to get suspicious afterwards and check. We've got to keep ahead of curiosity. Is the suit too heavy?"

Jimhu squared his meagre shoulders and delivered the stock vaunt of the puny: "I'm thin but I'm wiry, tuantatha."

Once more in the corridors, the massive suits made them conspicuous. But the bigger the bluff, the safer. Most citizens were at home in the fondum-brace of pansensor or mate at this hour; and none at all appeared in the industrial section of the building, through which most of their journey wound by inconspicuous channels.

At last Jimhu let them into a sort of janitor's passage which led them twenty yards and into a huge, chilly hall filled with skeets.

By luck, the watchmen were in full sight, their backs turned and their attention plugged into a pansensor. The day's games were over, and a female singer was distilling her hormones through brassy vocal cords, stroking the two men with phantom

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fingers and other anatomical details, and caressing their olfactory fibers with the standard aphrodisiac odors.

For a moment Pahad was embarrassed by the rigid convention that it was the crudest ill-breeding to interrupt anyone's pansensor-bliss. Then he repressed a chuckle. But he waited, holding Jimhu back, till the girl began a new song in even more stimulating undress. Then he gestured Jimhu on his way towards the hangar doors and began a stealthy advance on his prey.

As he approached, he found it increasingly hard to realize that the undulating, grimacing female stereotype facing him would not abruptly scream discovery. She was only a mirage of some doubtless worthy and hard-working girl projected down centuries, 'better' now than she had been in reality, because she involved no consequences. "Well," he thought, "when they *have* to deal with consequences, the worse for them." He levelled the needle-projector somewhat anxiously, not too sure of the stunning adjustment between mere stinging and outright murder. "Closer'n closer'n closer, oooh!" the girl sang with fine irony.

A terrific, thundering, bouncing crash from the far side of the hangar, burst the taut situation like a bullet through a balloon. Pahad almost dropped his weapon, and the two watchmen sprang from the depths of their ecstasy like galvanized frogs, turned, and saw him. Gigantic in his armor, looming out of the dark with levelled weapon and gleaming, dazzling mask, he must have been a bad dose for a weak heart. One of them dropped on all fours and made a frantic, scrabbling dash, even using Pahad's leg as a handhold. Pahad swung the needler but only jolted the fellow's posterior with the effect of a jet-assisted takeoff. The other had already bolted among the cradled skeets.

Pahad knew that in his armor he was no match for even the feeblest runner. He choked down an untimely desire to laugh, switched on his headphone and called Jimhu. The latter, to his great relief, responded promptly: "Sorry, tuantatha, I knocked over a stack of fuel-canisters. I'm not used to this suit."

"Never mind, get the door open. Those fellows'll bring the Patrol down on us, and *they* won't be soft gruel to deal with.

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Which skeet shall I make for?" (Blunders or not, without Jimhu he'd be sunk now!)

Jimhu's breathing showed that he was already running as he talked: "Stay where you are, tuantatha, till I see."

Through the whole brawl, the blonde had been working up to her climax. Pahad now became aware of her as a noisy distraction. He turned, and contemplated her, only technically dressed, her arms outflung in rapturous invitation. On him she had no more effect than a model of suave, grease-painted rubber with glass eyes and floss hair.

She simply was not a human being—like Elisi on the cave beach. He could no more imagine living, with her, the life of ecstatic intoxication about which she brayed, than with a fish. In fact, he couldn't imagine living it with anyone.

"You!" he said abruptly, "you've had your innings. You've spoilt Earth even for your own nonsense. Go home." He stepped through the image, picked up a light divan-bench, and swung it overarm on the pansensor. Image and song went out like a blown-out candle, with a crash and rattle of glass and flying metal, leaving him in the cavernous twilight of the hangar. It was a world of luring reality, but the world where Nada and Jarel lived, Elisi and Ben'.

Simultaneously he heard a rumble, and a torrent of icy air stiffened his half-masked face. Jimhu's voice crackled, "Come to the door, tuantatha. The skeet I was flying yesterday is still there and ready to go. Ha! The Patrol will not chase us in *this* storm!"

Pahad broke into a lumbering run: "Is she fuelled?"

"Up to capacity, tuantatha. She could take us anywhere on Earth."

A strange voice broke in, "Calling tuantatha Konor . . . For your own sake, answer . . . We have something to tell you."

With his foot on the skeet's ladder, Pahad felt secure. "All right," he said, "Distil it fast. I'm in a hurry."

"Tuantatha, you don't stand a chance in that storm out there. Even our emergency skeets are grounded. We're authorized to guarantee you your life, freedom, and present rank."

"The only life Andu Rameha has left me is out yonder. How about you, Jim'?"

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"Should I go back to get my brain changed? They would change yours, too," said Jimhu's broadcast voice. "Let's go!"

"Thanks for the offer," said Pahad, "We'd rather die quick if we have to die." He swung into the skeet's door and slammed it behind him.

Jimhu was already at work on the control-board, warming up the machine. He threw a switch and the skeet lifted by inches, hovered, and then lurched as if a weight had engaged her.

Pahad turned automatically and saw a helmet-framed face appear at the window of the door. A voice came flat and relentless through the phones: "In the name of the Race, ground this skeet. Ground it or I'll puncture your hull." A gauntleted hand waved a massive needler.

Pahad snatched hopelessly at his own light weapon. But Jimhu's voice crackled: "Rot you. Drop. I'm jetting."

Pahad saw the muzzle of the big needler arc threateningly . . . and was slammed staggering against the back of the compartment. The face was snatched away from the window, and a single grunt came through the ear-phones. Then all was silent.

CHAPTER 23

JIMHU

Or rather, everything was immersed in sound so total, it was equivalent to silence. The noise of the jets themselves was smothered. Except for the twitching needles of instruments, the skeet might have been embedded in a plastic, translucent for a few feet, and whose solvent was sound.

In a foot-square, rectangular navigation-frame, Pahad set the scale of operations, placed a pin-point of ruby light at the co-ordinates of the Colony, and an emerald light at the co-ordinates of the Lithlua cave, which he remembered as securely as

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his own name; and he sat back to watch the movement of the ruby point. The skeet, headed at an angle into the wind, crept forwards hardly faster than a man can walk.

Jimhu soon got tired of peering ahead into a three-foot depth of turbulent whiteness; free of care once more, he switched on the pansensor to see how the Night-shift Game was coming. When Pahad protested that they'd better be on the alert, he shrugged: "No Cities, no nothing. Every safety device ever invented. And we are flying in a straight line to a known point. Check?"

"Even the Patrol doesn't take chances with that fury out there, even the spacemen of the League! It's worse than Mars. I know."

"Well sure, you would have to be mighty careful if you were *out* in it. But these skeets provide for *every* emergency. And that reminds me: we got rations in case of a forced landing. We are free now. How about beginning with a square meal?" He rummaged out bean-sausage and fish-brick, some of which he generously pressed on Pahad. As they munched, he stared at the controls and whistled: "Bro*ther*, almost there!"

"Yes, and how do we reach the cave in this smother?"

"That is a good question," said Jimhu with his mouth full. "What do *you* say?"

"We'll land and sit tight. We should be able to walk it in a short time from here, once we can see where we're going."

Jimhu took the controls. Pahad assumed that a trained pilot could negotiate a landing better than he, but kept a cynical eye on the instruments. And so, he observed a disquieting thing: Sea-level altitude and air-speed fell off normally, but ground-altitude and -speed wavered and jumped. It didn't seem to bother Jimhu. He landed the skeet tipsily but without damage. "Whacko!" said he, "Howzatfra storm landing?" His stilted tuanto-ese was beginning to sag back into Basic Freeman.

"Terrific!" said Pahad for the sake of morale. But a horrible suspicion was crystallizing. "Jim'," he said presently, "we're lost."

"Couldnbe. Instruments don't lie. 'N I knowm'stuff. Check?"

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"Instruments can be fooled. Our ground speed was falsified by the heavy snow scudding under us."

Jimhu's face fell: "Whacko! Y'right! Never crossm'mind. Oh well," he brightened, "W'rokay. We b'ablta gow'erwewan when she clears."

Pahad felt it futile to point out that when she cleared they might have to blunder around a good bit, and the Patrol also would be unleashed with a good fix on their position. The only thing to do was sweat it out and hope their error wasn't too big.

That procedure, he presently discovered, wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Jimhu was able to occupy himself almost normally with the pansensor in the passenger-lounge. Pahad was only nauseated by the Games and Shows, and applied himself grimly to estimating the error in their position. And he kept his muscles toned up and invited sound sleep by fighting his way around the outside of the skeet fifty times every six hours. Jimhu, full of his own prowess as a Community-defier and Patrol-exterminator, tried this too, gambolling and capering in his space-suit like an insane robot, when not flattened by sudden blasts. His mind had been scrambled dimly through every pansensor experience, from shooting extinct monsters to shooting Niagara in a barrel; but the impact of even the most aimless real experience on his life-starved mind was dizzying. At least the work-outs did improve his rather mediocre staying-power.

On the third day, however, boredom was swept away by a new flood-level of menace: Pahad, attempting to identify enough mountains by sonar to triangulate their position, was startled by a blurted guffaw from the lounge. Freemen never laughed; they sat through the most extravagant efforts of the Funny Programs with hangdog stupefaction, and Jimhu's novel effort was a rusty outgribing. Pahad went to see what was up. Jimhu, sunk in a fluff-seat, tried to mold his mirth to something like decorum and explained, "Sh's tryanabelike awunIluv! Haw!"

Since 'The-one-I-love' was ones destined she-Freeman, the remark was cryptic. Pahad turned to the pansensor for enlightenment, but was only more deeply baffled for a moment: In the

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alcove emerged the head and shoulders of his beloved ex-wife, Ruara. And Ruara, he realized, after a long moment, thought she was talking Basic Freeman. The result was fantastic beyond anything Jimhu could grasp. Jimhu was simply enjoying, for the first time in his life, the plebeian delight-in-superiority over anyone who bungles language worse than oneself.

But Ruara, no doubt with expert assistance, was trying to employ Basic Freeman as if it were a rational language with structure and semantics—as if barnyard squawks had been codified for conveying social philosophy to the chickens. But behind the resultant rigmarole loomed an even more fantastic mirage of ideas: Ruara was exhorting Freemen to conform to her hallucination of what Freemen should be.

Yet behind even this, rang an urgency, a terror that was all the more frantic because it was shapeless. This was no mere pansensor-side chat. Scared, under her archness, she strove with man-to-man simplicities to shepherd her little flock away from some ghastly danger. Gradually, Pahad distilled what that danger was.

The Freeman, for all his lock-step lack of opportunity, still craved for every lunacy of natural man—mob hysteria, partisan chest-beating, self-dramatization. Nature abhors a vacuum, the war-appeal had broken the seal, and now, to the Great Realities, had been added another function of protoplasm: aggression. The starry-eyed mentors had sown the wind of their own hallucinations; they were reaping the whirlwind of good old-fashioned human greed and witlessness. As the Kerensky Democrats had been liquidated by the Bolsheviki, and the Polynesian Planners by the Green Insurgents, so the Freeman Millenium, with all the anticipated loot of Antarctica, was being taken over by the Freemen, spearheaded by the Patrol.

And the Patrol was not staffed by ruinous messiahs but by vindictive termites. Once they absorbed the already-regimented billions of Earth and confiscated the League's technology, they would burst over the galaxy like a disease, feeding and breeding. The bright hope of Toangahela would be only the first winged life the termite horde would strike down, foul, and devour.

To this faceless onslaught, Ruara was opposing sweet appeal.

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The end of her speech echoed through three levels in Pahad's mind. First, he saw what she was trying to say: "And so, dear friends, we must all work side-by-side to finish this unpleasant task. But we must never forget our vision: happiness for all, freedom, and joy in the Great Realities. We must be warned by the wicked people of long ago who made everybody miserable, even themselves, and hold firm to our ideals. And so I leave you, confident in your wise choice." The wind-up of a lovely speech —if not very precise as to mere ways and means—if only the audience had really been nothing but replica Ruaras!

Unfortunately, Basic Freeman somewhat clipped the soaring pinions. In actual syllables the speech came out: "Palomihart w'alltrublu smilunthruteers. Somehoweec'neverfaget everbudy-jumpinajive, allyacanastalife, funallatime. Badguyzonapansensor lonsumanblu, everbudylonsumanblu, pansensorinnanAssemly flotininHevnabuv. Levinyafonembrase dreaminallatime yurth-onywun'swunnerful."

Ruara, or her speech-writers, however, had failed to allow that all Freeman speech implied only what interested Freemen. Most of this incredible composition was a surrealistic rigmarole. As far as it had any meaning whatever to the Freeman mind, it might have been rendered: "Project companion, let's all plunge into an orgy of free love in preparation for junior's wedding. Wish you would hurry back to the unit because (censored), you are perfect like everybody else and have pansensor-shows. Pansensor villains were always having exciting, illicit love-affairs, and so can you. Wedding ceremonies are (censored). I have to go to my work-hour but (censored), you go through the cycles without a single slip."

Somehow, she must have realized that her audience would take from her words exactly what they desired, including an endorsement of the great crusade itself. Like many a mist-fed enthusiast in the tumbril on the road to the guillotine, she saw her fictitious paradise at last, as empty as her own idealized face. That face broke and trembled with an almost human bewilderment and apprehension, like the dying May-vel's long ago. She drew a long breath, glanced nervously around, and faded into an

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advertisement for a deodorant that had not been seen on Earth since Cities began.

Jimhu responded to the ad devoutly, subsiding into his native pansensor-trance. Pahad returned to his sonar: Somewhere below him, Elisi's square slept in its moonlight. And trifling as his contribution might be, he would strain every fiber to place himself between that quiet symbol and this ultimate menace that ultimate fatuity had loosed.

But the blizzard shrieked inexhaustibly. And his stored voltage found no outlet as the cockpit timekeeper clicked off the days into a second pentad . . .

The morning of the seventh day, he opened his eyes to find sun shining into them. In two seconds, he was shouting for Jimhu and pulling on his space-underwear. Jimhu popped out of the pilot's cabin, a happy grin on his face: "I wunnered when you would wake, tuantatha."

"Wondered! Why in the name of the Future didn't you *wake* me?"

"Well—you were asleep!"

"How long has the snow been stopped?"

"Only about twenty minutes."

Pahad didn't waste time or good-will raging over spilt fuel. What had the Patrol accomplished in twenty minutes? He plunged into the cabin and swivelled the scanner-screen colonywards. On the first reconnaissance, he caught three pips and one was moving straight towards them though still fifty kilometers away. He thought with violent speed: "No match for them in the air; only give yourself away by taking off. They'll come in shooting to kill, after the way Jimhu clobbered that Patroller back in the hangar. If you did beat them to the cave, they'd pick you off before you could reach it from the skeet." He turned to Jimhu: "Get the space-suits."

"Check, tuantatha!"

They piled into them, Jimhu reverently copying Pahad's urgency. Pahad checked every detail with a swift competence he

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had not known he possessed. "All the food we can carry, Jim'."

"Check!"

Minutes later they were running clumsily for some raw-swept rocks five-hundred meters distant. Pahad was counting on the Patrol craft having its scanners focussed for large, metal objects. Jimhu's voice came plaintively through the phones: "I don't get this, tuantatha."

"You'll see. Don't talk; they might pick it up."

At the rocks, Pahad, imitated by his henchman, scooped a foxhole in the snow. Among rocks, he figured, they would be part of a jumbled background to eye or instrument. And they could watch the skeet. He could see the Patrol craft now, an expanding fleck in the sky.

Head-phones crackled like stiff paper: "Tuantatha Konor. We see you." His neck crawled though he knew they meant the skeet. "Don't be a fool. You are visible to the naked eye. Come out and stand a hundred yards from the skeet. We'll pick you up."

"Whacko!" breathed Jimhu. Pahad could only hope it didn't carry well enough to pinpoint them. He dared not remonstrate.

"Tuantatha Konor, we're going to blast your skeet as soon as we're within range. If you come out, we'll let you run clear. If not—we don't care whether we take you or kill you. Please yourself."

The Patrol skeet was a large dot in the sky now, with the peculiar shape of any streamlined object seen head-on. Through his open visor he could hear her flat, vicious whine. The earphones recited relentlessly, "We're taking no chances, tuantatha. You'd better acknowledge. Come in. We're sighting. Come in . . . All right, if that's the way you want it." A small, solid thing detached itself from the Patroller, and plunged neatly, obliquely.

He had time to think vividly of how the arts of war had been passed down like the pineal gland, for a purpose that would never be required again . . . He had time to hope that the aim was good enough to hit the skeet, not five hundred meters beyond, and the blast not too horizontal . . . Then a war-bonnet of flame split the skeet into black, silhouetted fragments. The

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Patroller shot over and up into an almost vertical climb. Pahad jammed himself face-down in the snow. The flat slam of explosion jarred his body as if he were all ears. No epoch had ever been so sharply punctuated: combat had returned to Earth.

Now, would they come back looking for corpses? "Whacko!" breathed Jimhu, as if to tempt Fate. But the Patroller voice yapped with grim docility: "Calling headquarters. Patrol 109 calling. Skeet and occupants destroyed. Request orders."

A voice indistinguishable from the other replied, "Good work, Alv. All patrols return to base. Don't waste time. We have work to do."

The fugitives crouched waiting till the skeet dwindled into the lavender sky. Then they struck out in what Pahad knew must be the general direction of the coast. Now, once more, began the fight of muscle and endurance against blank distance. Only, *this* was the return lap!

Also, Jimhu provided distraction to occupy the mind. He alternately forged ahead and lagged behind, plunged on to a fabulous future and insisted on frequent halts. With speakers switched off, since their visors could be opened in the relative mild spell, he chattered incessantly in Basic Freeman.

What would become of the little man in the strong, resolute world of Toangahela? His impulsive revolt had shown a rudiment of character, and he was willing at least to follow a leader. But would those qualities fit him for even the simplest duties in the League? He had all the aptness of Homo domesticus for the rebellion that would set up heaven on Earth overnight; and he had all Homo domesticus' lack of pith for the long haul when new grievances sprang up in the place of old like old-time weeds.

Yet it was Jimhu who announced, with a whoop of triumph, the first view of ocean. From a crest, curiously broken terrain sloped to unmistakable pack-ice not ten kilometers away. Jimhu promptly started down.

Pahad halted him: "I don't like the look of that ground, Jim'. Besides, we'd better keep along high ground to that point out there. We still don't know which way the cave is, and that'll give us a view."

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Jimhu argued, in tuantoi: "We will reach the point faster if we go down that way. It is shorter and the Patrollers cannot see us. Come on!" He plunged ahead, lured by the ease of downhill coasting, sublimely indifferent to risk as an old-time motorist. In Programs, difficulties and deadly perils always beset one, but they were always foiled.

Pahad bit short his obviously futile counter-arguments, and cursed himself for not having simply roped them together, as he had done when Jimhu gave signs of wandering away from the skeet in the blizzard. He followed perforce, trying to get ahead so that he might judge the ground they were to traverse.

It was unfamiliar stuff. Broken rocks, too sheer to be drifted over, made miniature cliffs and gullies; fantastic bridges and hoods of hard snow seemed to have been frozen in the midst of furious motion. With continual checks and detours, the route was far longer and riskier than it could ever have been along the ridge. But Jimhu manfully, as befitted an old hand, refused to turn back. From the delights of liberty, he had gone on to those of invulnerable omnipotence. If Pahad balked, he simply pushed into the lead. Two near-crashes on deceptive slopes only exhilarated him. The one concession Pahad could get out of him was to turn on the head-phones in case they got separated.

Pahad, sweating and fuming, was just beginning to hope they would soon reach the level pack-ice. He could hear Jimhu, disdainfully in the lead again, expressing his joy-in-life by the only terms he knew: "Tastun'evenblis inyaburn-ankis, tastin'evenblis inyaburn-ankis." when abruptly, the song broke into a clutter of frightened animal sounds followed by silence.

Pahad, who had been figuring a way to cut ahead and regain the lead, snapped his eyes back towards Jimhu; they wavered for a moment with no point of support. Then he identified a black gap where Jimhu had last been.

He shucked off his packs and skis and crept forwards, first on knees, then on stomach, testing ahead with his sheathed arm. The ear-phones only buzzed and his urgent pleas vanished into emptiness. Near the gap his proddings dislodged a further mass of snow, which fell massively and silently from under his very chin, and left him looking aghast into an incredible, green slot.

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Facets and juts of ice closed off the downward view; nothing else was visible, and it was unthinkable that a human body, even space-suited, could have bounced down there from shelf to crag, and survived.

Nevertheless, to his skin-crawling horror, when he turned up his phone, it brought him sighs and groans as close as if he had been kneeling over the man. He said, gently, reassuringly, "Jim', Jimhu, I'm here. It's going to be all right. Can you hear me? It's all right." His mind probed frantically for anything to be done, anything he could even promise.

Jimhu's voice was blurred: "No 'tisn'. 'M a gonner, tuantatha . . . Can't feel my legs or belly . . . Wish I *couldn't* feel m'left arm . . . Man, this must be this pain they tell about on the Shows . . . but y' never feel it like this . . . All green'n blue . . . 'M cold too. Musta torn the suit . . ."

That fixed it. No possible way of getting down, of getting even a sound man to surface. And if the insulation were broken, it was only a question of time, suit-heater or no heater. He said, "I'm right here, Jim'. You'll feel better in a few minutes, and we'll figure something." But he thought agonizingly: This might stretch on and on.

"I'll feel better, a'right. Them capsules you showed me, the green ones'at letya goof off, like doctor stuff. I'm gonna take'm all."

Pahad couldn't countermand that.

Rustlings and painful breathing; then: "Tha's it. Feel better'ready . . . You there still? . . . Good . . . Say, tuantatha . . . tell me: this ice is going to melt off innali'lwhile, huh? . . . Well, then they'll find me down here, huh? . . . Well, tuantatha, wouldjast'em, when they do, would they put up something like one of those old-time monuments, like in a Show? . . . See, I'm the one guy in fifty-billion, who bust loose and *did* something . . . They won't put *me* into any reclamation-plant, to turn me back to the rotted Race . . . It took alla ice, anna storm, an'Patrollers, and'all, to finish *me* . . . I'd like M'mem'ry thrall'ternity . . ."

Pahad said stoutly, "I'll do that, lad. I'll tell you what! You started all this by defending those animal-people. I'll ask *them*

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to put up the monument, and then they'll always remember you as one of their heroes. Check?" He used the exasperating tag-word advisedly.

"Whacko!" The voice seemed to be retreating through heavy snow: "And Pa'd, you tell 'em all, all fifty billion, I'd rather die like this aftera timew'had, than . . . *two* fondm'brace thrall'ternty."

"I'll tell them, Jim'." (The Future grant that he'd ever get anywhere to tell anything.) "Jim' . . . are you there, Jim'?"

But Jim' had written Finis to his brief, fantastic saga.

CHAPTER 24

LONE FOX, PROUD WOLF

He edged back from the crevasse, collected his kit, and went on stolidly. He was spurred by the thought that his broadcast conversation with Jimhu could easily have been picked up by cruising Patrollers. He angled towards the rocky ridge that would have saved Jim's life, and scaled it. Its end was a headland, mostly raw granite exposed by the Great Thaw. There he halted and scanned the coast right and left.

The prospect numbed him: headland beyond nameless headland with petty glaciers between, and pack ice lurid in the low, vermilion sun. Still lost! Choice of direction was a pure toss-up. And the toss-up was likely one between life and death.

He recalled, now, that Jimhu had taken the food-pack with him; for Pahad had sorted the loads to put himself in charge of fragile, vital equipment. Clever fool! He'd assumed, as fatuous as Ruara herself, that he was dealing with a full-blown, human intelligence. Anyhow, he was left with the few pounds of glycogen in his muscles and liver, and maybe as much again in the suit's iron rations, to pit against this fanged desolation, fuel for a brief candle . . .

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A thought decided him: He could possibly reach the Colony or get within distance to supplicate rescue. And Ruara would see that they sent it, with her smile of serene patronage . . . Abruptly he turned his back on that sanctuary, and struck out towards the farther headland . . .

Did he skirt four savage bays or five? Later he could never decide. But the sun slunk ever closer to the hills inland, lavender shadows of the peaks reached for him, throwing a corpse-like chill. At dusk, the wind got to its feet, shook itself, and began to prowl. Famished and spent, he voted himself a sleep and a ration of food concentrates . . .

The concentrate canister was all but empty. Well . . .

He couldn't score himself off for that. Of course, he'd eaten the stuff going to the Colony. He'd had no time or opportunity to replenish it after he knew he'd need the suit again, even if he'd thought of it; and skeet-provisions weren't concentrates . . . Blight that! What to do now? Sleep. And eat the remaining mouthful before he went on. . . .

He woke in the dark with the wind trampling and mouthing over him, not a blizzard as this continent counted blizzards but a bullying tempest just the same. Why waste energy fighting it? Why not sleep on, cosy in the suit, till dawn?

Because, he'd had his sleep, dawn was five or six hours off, and energy was smoldering away while time wasted. He heaved up and started on, chewing his one mouthful of food . . .

Five savage bays, or six? The snow-filled dark was eternal . . .

Not quite. Pale light, too weak to throw a shadow yet, dissolved in the sky behind him. He found his feet stumbling, his hands shaking when he unlatched the skis to cross bare rock.

He could make the next headland. And that was all.

It was all. He sat on an outcrop while the rousing light showed him yet another arctic bay, another headland. And beyond that another.

Well . . . at least he'd die fighting, not waiting for it to come to him. He rose to his feet.

And halted. The first frozen-red glint of sun under the rim of

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the clouds, touched a movement beyond that next headland, a gauzy pinkness floating and dissolving . . .

His trembling muscles tightened. Other warm springs might make other steam-clouds along the coast. But . . . he'd see what that one was, just for the fun of it.

The valley between the headlands was a wide one, and rough. The wind hurled onslaughts of rosy snow-crystals across his path. But the sky cleared and light grew stronger . . .

The rim of vision will catch a flicker that direct gaze might have missed, catch it and turn the head . . . His direct gaze saw nothing for a moment, and then again a spark in the sky north-eastwards. The spark held for a heart-beat and vanished. But he knew what it was. And he knew why it was just there. All yesterday, after picking up his last words with Jimhu, the Patrol must have shadowed him, keeping in the eye of the sun, tracking him to his destination. In the dawn, they'd had to come nearer to pick him up again; but even so, only chance had betrayed them. Score one for the Patrol! But, now what?

Turning back at this point would tell them just as much as going on. Play the game out, he thought, giddy with hunger.

In another hour, he topped the rise and scanned the bay. It *was* his bay, he had no doubt at all. Yet, if he had not caught that whiff of steam in the level sun, he might have passed inland from it, and failed to recognize it at all. He snickered foolishly to himself parroting an old tag of rhyme: "Early to bed, and early to rise . . ." Yes! His resolution in pressing on had brought him to his goal. It had also brought the Patrollers. What a joke on everybody if he'd slept another couple of hours, missed the cave, pushed on till he dropped, and been picked up and taken back to the Colony!

"But they're here and I'm here. And now, how do I get to the cave entrance? Those cliffs go down in a sheer drop from cape to cape." He glanced back and saw the skeet-glint closing in; they'd interpreted his maneuvers shrewdly, and now they were going to scoop both the cave entrance and himself!

He marked one last, slim hope. Crouched behind a mass of boulders, to keep them guessing as long as he could, he struggled out of the space-suit while minutes flickered. The bleak

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cold drenched through his heavy clothing as if through straw mats. At the head of the bay, half a kilometer away just beyond the steam, the cliff was at its lowest and looked overhung. He started towards it, light without the suit, and from hunger. The skeet swung in towards him. He began to hear the querulous whine, changing pitch as it banked. In his mind's eye he could see, as clearly as in any pansensor, the blank-faced gunners and bombardiers making ready for the kill.

He took reckless risks sprinting over the treacherous rock-and-ice, a perfect target in his black tights. The skeet was swooping towards him. Death! Was he going to be too late by just a few seconds?

Here was the spot. The cliff was overhung all right, praise Fortune! And the water below was clear of ice. He flexed his knees and vaulted out into giddy space without losing the momentum of his run.

Bitter air burned his ears and nipped his face as he plummeted. He seemed to be falling into the cavern of a great, pallid rainbow that hung in the steam.

Then, instantly, warmth closed around him; salt water smarted in his nose. He battled furiously for distance before he surfaced. But once he came up he didn't dive again—he couldn't stay under another ten seconds. He could only swim frantically, breathing down to his guts at each roll . . . A heavy jar, like the blasting of the skeet . . . Some unrecognized memory from some pansensor told him to roll on his back. Too late, of course, if there *had* been water-borne concussion; but the maneuver let him see a segment of the bluff, behind him, leaning slowly out towards him, fragments showering from it black and solid, black smoke boiling down from above. That Patrol! They missed no tricks! Instead of trying for a tiny, nimble target, they'd dislodged a thousand tons of thundering death to blanket him.

But they failed. He swam violently and gained a margin of safety before the landslide struck. The surge from its impact only buoyed him forwards, though spray and tiny grains of sand stung his cheek as he rolled for air. He curved shorewards now,

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fighting for every yard of gain he could add to his tally. They'd be trying again, immediately.

A surge of pure, defiant life, as great as the surge of water carried him on its crest. So far he had struggled forwards in dogged determination, in shrewd weighing of chances, in desperate rage. Now, a youth he had never claimed in his youthful years tingled through brain and muscle. Not blood but polta pulsed in his limbs as he hurled himself on.

The cave yawned ahead of him, over him. He reared in the water and uttered a shout of triumph. Home! Not for duty or tradition or even curiosity, but for body and soul. Ben', Elisi, Jarel, here I come!

In the green twilight he saw ahead of him the spur of rock where he and Elisi had huddled from the orca. He reached it and scrambled up. There were the fish-bones. But where was Hauk? Where was everybody? He glanced back and, in the twisted triangle of door, saw the skeet far out but coming in head-on.

He knew instantly what it was going to do: It couldn't fly in, of course; but it was going to skip-bomb the entrance as he had seen it done in pansensors of the bad old days. He took a header on the far side of the point and swam on furiously. They *couldn't* stop him now. And yet, an avalanche of falling roof could finish his career as brutally as a needle-ray out there in the open.

It was shut, fastened solid as rock.

Now he was past the elbow of cave—so much the safer! Now his feet touched bottom. Each breath he drew was weighted with the suspense of being perhaps his last. He churned dripping up onto the rocky beach. The door! He reached it and grasped its latch.

At the same moment, a heavy roar pulsed in the cavern, filling it solid, bouncing him against the door. The twilight was blinded, and a burnt-sweet tang of some explosive tinged the following blackness. A tidal-wave burst around him, waist-high, and sucked him back.

In one microsecond, as he staggered in the back-drag and

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groped blindly, he tasted more compressed despair than in all his fox-flight. Disowned! That was why they had not answered his summons from skeet and headphone. After all his heroic battle, to be shut out by a mere thickness of door, to die in the dark!

With automatic precision, his hand caught and grasped the heavy latch of the door.

And now it yielded and the door swung wide, almost throwing him. A soft, warm light glowed on the churning waters. And a man's figure sprang forwards. "Pa'd!"

"Ben'!" Nothing had ever felt so warm or solid as the man's hand.

He lurched inside and was staggered by the impact of something that flung its arms around his neck, squealing, "Oh, Pahad tuan! You *did* it! Oh, you're *won*derful!"

"Let the man get his breath, Elisi," Benuha drawled, "Looks like he's got to survive one tidal wave after another."

She drew back, slightly abashed, looking four years less than her fourteen, and immediately became all professional woman among dunderheaded men: "Well, I can *hug* him, I should hope, after all we've been *through* on his account. But now let's get him down to Holvor's and out of that wet suit, ugh!"

They set out, timing themselves to the tottering dregs of Pahad's exultation, past craning groups of Lithlua. As they went, Benuha explained a few things: "No, as long as you were on the right track, we didn't radio; it would just have helped the Patrol. We were all set to jump the moment you seemed to be in more trouble than you could handle . . . No, we didn't suspect you were out of food—it didn't seem like the way you usually do things. And we didn't spot that Patroller skeet till just after you did. We started an overland party with anti-skeet weapons racing to meet you; maybe they'll get the beggars yet. Just as well you didn't have to rely on them, though . . . No, we didn't know Hauk had bolted that door till we heard you fighting it. We" he glanced at Elisi, "were waiting to surprise you."

Elisi was silent, lilting along beside them.

In Holvor's quarters, he got a warm, dry change, and a cup of

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hot, strong stimulant and food. As he pulled down the tunic, something rough brushed his hand. He glanced down and saw, on the right breast, the circled map of the rebel continent. A thrill of pride and strength completed the work of the half-hour breather, and restoratives.

"And now," Benuha said, "can you do just a little more?"

"Pah!" said Pahad, "I've had a twenty kilometer tramp and climb, and a bit of a swim. And I *was* half starved. But you and Elisi were two shots in the arm better than hua-hua. I *couldn't* rest. What have you got for me?"

Benuha smiled satirically: "*That* kind of braggart, eh? Well, Jarel is meeting an embassage from your pals, the Patrol in" he glanced at his timer, "about twenty minutes. He said he wished you could be there."

Pahad threw back his head and laughed: "Well, I was almost late—almost detained, in fact. But I'll be there."

CHAPTER 25

KING'S PAWN TO K4

He had no more than time for a warm hand-clasp with Jarel who stood tall and crimson-suited among a band of rebel tuan-toi-tan. No ranks were indicated; no insignia were worn but the Rebel badge. Jarel, it seemed, was to be their spokesman. They stood in a natural ice-cavern, like the one where Pahad had opened his eyes when he first came to Toangahela, but floored with some dull-gleaming gray substance against which the colors of costume stood out brilliantly.

He had hardly ranged himself behind Jarel's right shoulder, when a gong sang loudly and, at the other end of the cavern, a group seemed to emerge from the green depths of the ice. The central three were in black, with black, featureless hoods over

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their heads. The rest were guards, typical subalterns of the League. They halted while the guards removed the hoods, then the three ambassadors advanced up the hall.

Pahad felt a stirring, not of hatred, though the Patrol had sought his life scarcely an hour before and had indirectly killed Jimhu, but of proud antagonism. These were no enemies to despise, at least. They marched resolutely, confidently, as if they had already organized the whole Race behind them—and no-one could guess what billions of fighting material they might not salvage from decadent humanity. What sort of Race, he thought in terrifying parenthesis, might they not mold now that it was in their hands? What militarized termite-swarms shaped from blank Freeman material, might they not launch on the universe? What an ironic, not entirely unprecedented, transformation of the Andu-Ruara gospel! Well . . . he, Pahad, had balked their most ruthless efforts.

When they were within ten yards of the waiting Rebels, Jarel stepped forwards with graceful courtesy: "You wished to see us. What do you wish with us?"

The leader of the embassage glanced quickly around the crescent of the Rebel Tuantoi-tan, as if looking for insignia. He said in the toneless voice of the Patrol, "My message is to be delivered to those calling themselves Tuantoi-tan of this community. Are you they?"

"We are. And I speak for us all."

"This then is my message: Because of irregularity in the administration of this region, misuse and criminal withholding of resources, and acts detrimental to the World Community, the World Tuantoi-tan commands that all facilities and precincts of this continent be surrendered to control of the Council's agents, and that the persons styling themselves Continental Tuantoi-tan give themselves into custody to appear before the World Council in answer to the above charges. That is the substance of it, tuanto; here is the formal summons." He presented an antique scroll of foil densely filled with voice-graph.

Jarel glanced at it cursorily and a smile twitched his moustache. "Since you hardly expect us to treat this as more than a formality," he purred, "what else have you to say?"

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"That if you do not obey, we will drive you out of here as those of old drove destructive animals."

Jarel's eyebrow lifted: "Big words, officer. Can you back them?"

"I am instructed to warn you: You are only five millions, you are one to ten thousand. We will blockade your coast, destroy your sources of sea-food, sink your submarine craft if you send them out, starve you. Our terms will then not be as generous as now."

Jarel considered him sharply for the first time: "That will take at least fifty years, probably much longer. Meantime you will be having your own difficulties. Your world will be in turmoil; without our help, it will be in chaos. In reply to Andu tuanto's broadcasts, we have offered to manage events so that not a life need be lost. If we are engaged in a death-struggle for our future, we cannot guarantee so much. Can you crush us with one hand and hold down panic in the Freeman world with the other?"

The Patroller's face was impassive: "In fifty years, or a hundred, the waters will not have advanced far enough to endanger us seriously. Our people are civilized and obedient. They will not panic."

Jarel stroked his beard: "Very well, then; this is our answer: You have occupied Kilimanjaro and Chimborazo. Do you suppose that we can carry on our purpose only from points on the equator? They were merely a little more advantageous. But, know this; on this continent we have stored enough reactors to fuel every miner that might leave Earth in the next eight-hundred years. They are placed to exert maximum torque on Earth if we discharge them." He paused to give the statement emphasis, and elaborated: "The effect would not be a catastrophe. But it would treble acceleration in the change of axis, and give you your hands, and arms, full, long before you starve us out—shatter your Communiity into factions."

The Patroller's face was expressionless as a turnip. He waited.

Jarel went on, quiet as the flare of a nova: "The new torque would, of course, be asymmetrical, and would throw the Earth into complex motion. Even the present swing will continue after

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the axis is upright, unless it is checked. But if we fire the emergency supplies, *no* source of energy left on Earth can counter them. The globe will continue to somersault slowly forever. But the first turn-over would be all that mattered. When Earth was pole-end to the sun, one half would scorch, the other, freeze.

The only antidote would be to bring more reactors from other planets. And your people could not half learn to do that before disaster overwhelmed you. You would have to make terms with us. So make them now, before this vast power is wasted, before your Community is violently rather than quietly transformed, while you can still treat with us as equals."

Pahad's head swam at the aplomb of a man, an organization that discussed playing with the inhabited globe, as if explaining a toy to a child.

The ambassador's lips moved hypnotically: "We are not authorized to make terms, but to accept your submission." It was reflex automatism, the demand of the Race whose all-devouring claims had never been defied. Behind it the more articulate automatism of Andu's messiah urge, Ruara's hypertrophied foster-instinct—and now this insect aggressiveness.

Jarel stared thoughtfully at the man and said, as if chiefly for his own instruction, "Clip the abdomen from a feeding wasp, and it will go on feeding . . . You, of all things living, have been most wronged by this monstrous Community; and yet you can see nothing outside it. You will march into the ocean like the fabled lemmings, and carry the Community with you. Well," he finished more briskly, "our surrender you shall not have, now or ever. And if you won't talk terms, it is you who have set the stakes at all or nothing. Warn your superiors that we will spring our mine at the first hostile move made against us. That is all."

The Patroller raised his heavy face and retorted stolidly, "You will not be permitted to fire any mine. And if you did, we would find a way to counteract it. The Race is one and indivisible and eternal. You cannot shake it."

The two stood confronting each-other, Jarel a crimson irresistible force, the Patroller an immovable hulk of black granite, embattled chess-men in a game of life against death.

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Yet Pahad felt that Jarel had brought him there to take part in this moment, a flanking knight. He said, "Patroller, I was a Freeman child. And I was the man your skeets and bombs failed to kill just now. A Freeman came with me and died defying the Community. You yourself defied the Community, or you would not be in the Patrol; you turned back and licked the hand that wounded you. But there are enough like myself, and Jimhu—and like you might have been—to sprout when the dried earth is wet. They will join with us to make a world where minds like mine and yours are not condemned to death because they dare to live. You are fighting against that world, for the world that kills. Remember that!"

The ambassador's mutton face merely turned and stared without interest. But over the face of one of his supporters glimmered an expression that might have been pain, or realization, or surmise, or all of them.

The Patrollers were escorted from the cavern; the Tuantoi-tan dispersed. Jarel walked beside Pahad. "You spoke in season, Pahad. You struck where you could start a fissure," he said, "now, go and rest. We'll need you for a great deal more. You're our most powerful instrument for stirring thought in human brains. So, rest now."

Back in his old room, with the Atlantean farm outside in an Autumn sunset, he felt like anything but rest. The events of the past thirty-six hours, from the bombing of the skeet, through the death of Jimhu and his own desperate escape, to the embattled chessmen in the ice hall, seemed to extend back through pentads. He dutifully undressed and showered; got into bed bolt awake—and fell whirling into a gulf of oblivion.

But, as he fell, he knew that something had been lacking in his return, something more vital even than his welcome into the League's councils.

Two days later, cheek by jowl with Jarel at a probe-screen, he watched huge, unskeet-like, arrow-shaped aircraft rock and veer —the unsatisfying glimpses usual in unrehearsed events. Over eighty of the things had been spotted converging from all com-

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pass-points on central Antarctica, stratosphere craft, soaring above blizzard level, unwrapped from some storehouse where the Patrol had brooded over them for centuries.

"Converging on our buried reactors," said Jarel, "now, how the famine did they pin-point it so neatly? The blighters!"

Pahad laughed: "Obvious! Andu! Now what? Blow them into space?"

"Not yet anyway. They'd have to dig for pentads to reach the stuff. And they must know we could blow it at any time. Otherwise, we don't quite see what they *can* do."

"Don't ever underestimate what Andu and—and Co., can do, or make others do. I did. But, if it came to a showdown, *would* you blow them up?"

Jarel weighed his answer: "You mean, because we've been so anxious to make things easy for those—those poor insects? This is war, P'ad, and we'll meet force with force . . . P'ad—why do you still say 'you'? Aren't you in this *with* us?"

"Jarel . . . there's still something that won't fit. Look here, what *are* you people? A new species? And if you are, how can I join you?"

Jarel's diabolus beard lifted: "No! *We* are the old race. With a lot of the weak-minded genes weeded thin, and the creative ones planted thick, and the moron environment abolished, yes. But the Community's the mutant."

Pahad grinned, quoting the old saw: "The waves won't march with my paddle."

"That's right. Real life bucks the waves. The moment you begin to accommodate to them—the Great Simplicities—you resign from evolution."

"But how do you get along without—well, the Great Simplicities?"

"You don't. But how do those others get along without the hundred things *they*'ve pushed into a corner? Vision, wonder, fantasy, aspiration are just as real as herding and breeding, and a blasted sight more delightful. After all, tribe and family themselves are only a means to wider skies." He watched parachutists sprinkle the sky like encroaching seeds of some hungry weed. Then: "*They*'ve made terms with the universe."

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"Don't you *have* to make terms with the universe?"

"Yes. But the *whole* universe, with your *whole* self; not some grubby little corner where the rabbit part of you has dug itself in."

"That'll take you forever, literally."

"It will. That's what life's for. That's what *I* mean by religion."

"So you're the simple race that evolves and sees most; and the offshoot's an unbalanced monster . . . Jarel, what in the name of the Future are you going to do with fifty billion—or even forty billion monsters? I don't think you could have assimilated even one Jimhu. They've diverged too far."

"That's been our biggest headache: Now maybe Andu—and Co.—have settled it for us. We'd planned not to destroy a single life, just halt the spawning of ciphers. But if he's going to pile human-sea attacks against our defenses—well, we won't be blackmailed into surrender like keepers of the flame in the past. Does that answer your question?"

"The one I asked, yes. Not the one I still don't know how to ask. And I can't be really one of you till it's been asked and answered."

A pentad later, he was still searching for the question.

He had volunteered for a job he alone could do, mind-probing the Patroller invasion. He knew the psychology of Andu and could at least approach that of a Patroller. Where elaborate instruments predict the weather and err, a woodsman sniffs the wind, cocks an eye at Old Baldy, and says 'rain before dawn' infallibly.

So he crouched in a plastic bubble on a mountain-side facing the deathly plateau of central Antarctica, and probed. The work was drab: a Patroller's mind was barren and dreary as the landscape; the ranks simply labored and guarded with ant-like singleness; the officers knew more, but had a discipline to close their minds against probing. But at least he could watch through their eyes. So he watched.

He had learned only that their plan of attack was not the obvious one of sinking a shaft directly to the reactors. Once into

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bed-rock, their drillings spread horizontally, a growing system of corridors and chambers. The mystery was more disquieting than assault with hordes and continent-cracking blasts. At a staff meeting of the Rebel Council, the more impetuous faction, sharing that disquiet, had urged: simply raid the enemy installation and corral the crew.

Pahad himself had scotched that: "They'd simply pour in another crew and another, till you had millions of intractable prisoners . . . No, you couldn't ship 'em home. They'd sink your ships, prisoners and all." But he went back to his post with the admonition ringing in his ears, "All right. As long as you do figure out their little surprise before they spring it."

So he faced the harsh monotony of Antarctic Winter and Patroller minds, sharing the tension of the threatened citadel, the nameless menace.

Friends came to lighten his vigil, Jarel, Benuha, even Elisi awed and excited, and her parents. When he went off duty, he had boundless resources of rich, quiet sociability, if he was equal to it. Yet this kindness only aggravated the elusive, nagging reservation in his mind. He *was* home, where he had longed to be; and still he couldn't accept it.

He argued points with Jarel, hoping to stumble on some lead: "You took me back without question or reproach—with honor. Why?"

"Because we knew you belonged here, then. You seem to be the only person who doesn't know it now. Your mind, your intelligence belong here."

"Intelligence! My whole career's been a series of blunders, trusting Andu, betraying the Citadel, fancying I could sway the Community."

"You did what any intelligent man would have done on the information available."

"An intelligent man would have waited till he had fuller information. This time I'm going to have it."

Meantime, provisionally, he worked for the League. Or, not the League, for Jarel, Elisi, Ben'. About them, he could trust sheer instinct.

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But his search for certainty was longer, bleaker than his trails on the surface had been.

And he found his goal again alone and unaided . . .

He and Jarel were being entertained by an old couple, of very high rank, but pleasant, easy company, fond of choice music, twinkling conversationalists. They were probably picked to soothe him; the novel foods and drinks the little, old woman served were very like invalid delicacies, he thought ruefully. He sat, holding his mind to the cheer and fellowship. It flinched when the communicator gonged softly.

The old gentleman answered, and turned to Pahad apologetically: "Tuantoi-tan, I know you shouldn't be bothered in your off hours, but your substitute says this looks odd."

"I have no off hours, tuantoi-tan. Maybe *this* is the break."

The relief-watcher connected the mind-probe neurreson of the look-out post through to a powerful apparatus that just somehow happened to be in an alcove off the living-room . . . Pahad plugged himself in . . .

Through a Patroller's eyes, he looked at the grim landscape of their mysterious installation, huge semi-cylindrical buildings half sunk in the ice, mountainous ridges of ice and rock disgorged from their mines. His host-Patroller was running heavily towards the nearest mine-head, in a queer, half-familiar panic: "Late! Late! Can I get there in time?" Strangely, the scene was deserted, no other black figures moved, no ore-cars. The Patroller sprang into the screw-lift, almost agonized by his inability to speed it up: "Late! Late! Why wasn't I told?" Reaching a deep level at last, he ran desperately along a corridor, nightmare-like, without visible end, past uncounted doors.

Pahad's independent mind puzzled over those doors for the twentieth time: Enough to house an army. Yet why should the Patrol, or Andu, billet an army *there*?

Abruptly, the runner swerved into a side-corridor. And, in a flash, Pahad knew! Knew what the Patrol was about. Knew why he shrank from his own friends.

An Assembly Hall! For a City! The construction crew filled only a corner of it. But already, as his host-Patroller joined the

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ranks in his allotted place, the Power, the Communal Mind surged through that small group. Even during his return visit to the Freeman City with Nada, Pahad had not felt it so overwhelmingly. Through the Patroller's mind, through the probe and relay and neurreson, it closed around him like a stifling blast of narcotic smoke. It sucked him in, like a giant heart sucking in a blood-corpuscle to pump it out again, without volition, to its appointed task. This Patroller adoration, this red-raw ecstasy of self-immolation, paled the Freeman orgasm to thin gruel. As the neuter insect has no existence but in the swarm, so too the Patroller. No wonder they served with such blind and savage dedication; no wonder they could dominate the sex-dulled Freemen!

He fought himself free from the hideous organism, as he had from the Freeman assembly. His matured strength was hardly equal to the more violent wrench; and this time his selfhood did not close around him like a clean membrane—something had been torn from him, to leave him weak, agonized, and incomplete. He emerged into the pleasant sitting-room, the company of his friends, as if they, not the hideous Assembly, were the illusion . . .

He lifted the contacts from his head, tried to rise, and staggered. Jarel and the older man sprang to his side, half-lifted him to an arm-chair. Other members of the company, looking startled, tactfully withdrew. He leaned back for a minute, rallying himself, gulped a cup of hot, bitter-sweet stimulant they pressed on him, achieved a wan, unreal composure. "All right," he said at last, "I've got it—what the Patrol is doing. They're going to use your sentiment about killing Freeman against you. They're going to plant a City of fifty million over your precious reactors. *Then* will you dare to fire the mine! They've found the countermove to your checkmate." He lolled back, almost mocking, almost enjoying Jarel's expected consternation.

But instead, Jarel lunged forward eagerly: "Not they! Ha! Now we'll cut the knot, as I've always wished to do." He swung to the old Councillor: "You see? Grab this crew now and fire the mines before they can send in another—or their fifty-million Freemen. Thank the Future, we can't hesitate any longer."

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The old man nodded slowly. Evidently he too believed Pahad's revelation implicitly.

Jarel swung back to Pahad joyously: "So now, we'll live to see this new world emerging. Are you with us, P'ad?"

Pahad pulled himself erect, and waited till he felt his legs firm under him. Then he said, heard himself saying, "No, Jarel, I'm not . . . I've discovered that too, and why . . . I can never give myself to any Community . . . Yes, yours is beautiful and brave. I wish it victory . . . But to me . . . Community is death. I'll stand alone . . . And now I've done my job for you, I want to be alone. I'm tired . . ." He bowed ever so little, and turned away.

They were men of understanding. They let him go.

He passed like a sleep-walker through Toangahela where already announcement and decision spread like wild-fire, the shining body and brain of the League springing into action. He spoke mechanically to friends for whom his private decision was as yet unknown. He stumbled into his apartment—'his' still —utterly foredone, drained of his last strength and his last hope, drained far beyond that moment when the wave dragged him back from the locked door.

This moment would last . . . forever . . .

CHAPTER 26

THE PERFECTIONIST

The picture-window, the farm asleep under the stars, soothed him a little; if only it were real! Some of Elisi's antique books lay on the window-seat; they consoled him too. For a little while, *she* would still be herself, not part of any Community, evil or less evil.

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He sank into an arm-chair and dozed feverishly, his mind wheeling in a slow whirlpool: If only Elisi were ten years older, he could take her away from all these monstrous Minds. But then, if she were ten years older, she'd be already integrated . . . Lights twinkling in the farm. Ah! *Those* were the days—gone forever . . . Questions, slippery as jellyfish: what to do, where to go, when, how . . .

He forced himself to totter to the galley, munch down some biscuit, wash his throat with polta.

Back in the arm-chair, the polta helped him to a restless doze . . .

He was roused from that by the communicator clanging relentlessly—Jarel, buoyant with energy, flown with preparations for the seizure of the Patrol invaders, but solicitous: "You look done in, P'ad! D'you want anything? Shall I send you a doctor?"

"I've seen a doctor," Pahad lied, "he said I just need rest and quiet."

"Shall we detail Ben' to come around?"

"No. Nothing he could do. Don't rob him of his part in the fun."

"Yes, but we'll want you in shape to make an appeal over a global hook-up in a couple of days."

"Don't count on me, Jarel. I've resigned, don't forget."

The mephistophelian eyebrow cocked: "Ah, you'll feel different in a day or so, man; *if* you give yourself a chance."

"Think so? All right; we'll discuss things in a day or so."

He threw himself on the bed. Yes, they'd discuss things: where to retire the man who had given the crucial thrust to this thousand-year epic. But now, while the Rebel host was riding forth from their elf-caverns, for the first coup of Life's new empire, while Jarel and Ben' relieved the gestes of old, forgetful of him, he, Pahad, thanked Life that life did not last too long . . . in that mood, he saw dawn waking like a girl's first blush, and must have fallen asleep again from sheer incapacity to absorb any more punishment.

He woke to a drumming on the door. His subconscious told him it had been going on insistently. If he didn't answer, Ben-

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uha or whoever, would decide that something was wrong and force the door. He rose stiffly and tottered across the room.

But he was quite unprepared to find, standing there, Elisi fresh and delicate as a daffodil. His first reaction was a healthy shame that she should see him haggard, unshaven, and faltering like a third-bottle polta-man. His second was a bewildered curiosity as to what could have brought her calling on him alone at dawn.

But before he could find words, she said with a timidity she had never before displayed towards him, "I . . . I heard you were sick."

He managed an unstable smile: "No, not sick. Just tired . . . Elisi, you shouldn't be here alone." Then he could have flayed himself for having said it.

She bridled with dignity: "It's all right with *you*. Only . . . I . . . I came with a friend of yours who was afraid you . . . mightn't be very glad . . ."

His brain alerted wearily. What sort of deal was this? Using the child to breach his defenses! He said with wary jocularity, "Surely I'm not that barbarous? Anyone who thinks I'd bite him must have a bad conscience."

She gave a little pant of nervous laughter: "I *did* tell them you were . . . nice. But I came anyway, because *I* was worried too. And so . . ." She flitted a quick, involuntary glance to her left.

It was an unintentional signal. The older, but not much taller, girl who appeared beside Elisi was wearing a copper-red sarong . . . Nada? He didn't want to see Nada! . . . Oh, but he had something he *had* to see Nada about, an apology . . . couldn't drive her out. He said deliriously, "Well, you do turn up in the most unexpected places. Come in, then."

She had hardly waited for the invitation, but brushed past him and glanced around, snorted daintily, and exploded: "Just look! *What* a way to do things! (No, not *you*, Pahad.) Sit down." Then, as he obeyed gratefully: "When did you eat last?"

"Don't feel like eating." He tried to sound reasonable, but it came out sulky.

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"I should think not. I suppose you've been dosing yourself with polta."

He rallied a grin: "One shot—with biscuits."

"Sorry. I might have known you'd be sensible—*that* far. Wait. She slipped into the corridor where Elisi was lurking discreetly, whispered, and came in again, taking the door off the latch and closing it.

He had rallied more of himself by then. "Look here, Nada tuantatha; I *do* want to see you. But not just now—please!"

She brushed it aside: "*What* doctor saw you? . . . Yes, I thought so. But I agree, you *don't* need one, just a chance to get your breath."

"That's what I'm taking. And I don't want to see anyone till I've sorted things out. So go away, like a good girl."

She neither pled nor bossed, but sat on the window seat facing him, hands clasped in lap: "Pahad, how long since you left the University?"

He groped back incredulously: "Seems like years, but I guess it isn't."

"Less than two hektads," she told him quietly, "and in that time you've done feats nobody has done for a thousand years —and not many before that, I thould think. You've drained yourself physically and mentally at least three times. You've rid yourself of an old world and learned a new one. You've faced and witnessed naked death. Then you took on a problem that would daunt a fresh starter, and solved *that*. And then something, nobody seems to know what, was the last fish that burst the net . . . Just what kind of sorting-out are you going to do, skulking in here, nervously exhausted, giddy from hunger, and running a fever most likely? I suppose, a couple of days of *that* and you'll be back to normal!"

She had something there, he was forced to admit. "Well, let's go out and eat. Then we can talk, if you insist."

"Nothing of the sort. Elisi's gone for some things. I'm going to get ready in the galley to cook them. And *you* get into bed. If no-one else in the League can take time off from the crisis to attend to you, Elisi and I will, if it's just for a day."

"Benuha's quite adequate, thank you. He can do what's neces-

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sary." He hated to sound stuffy, but things were getting out of control.

"Benuha already has: Jarel sent for him, and somehow *he* knew about *me* and sent for me. And I . . . wasn't quite sure how you'd receive me, so I got Elisi. Now . . . you're a giant, Pahad tuantoi-tan, but even a giant can't wade the ocean. Get to bed before Elisi comes back, do!" Her homage, crystal sincere, was made palatable by a spice of unfeminine banter.

Nevertheless, he fumed to himself against all practical, competent women as he submitted and undressed, to the accompaniment of kitchen sounds (disorganizing his and Ben's system, no doubt). And yet . . . it *was* good: something to lean back on, as she said—not the suffocating pillow of Freeman fondling and clinging, but something cool and fresh like new sheets. It was soothing too to be served in bed—strong broth, delicate small fish, and tiny, golden vegetables. Elisi got a glow out of waiting on him and bringing his shaver, as if she were the shield-maiden of some candidate for Valhalla. Nada kept in the background. As both the girls attacked the mild task of washing up, he dozed off into a real sleep.

His last thought was: It's a pity, though, after she had become such a firebird, lost past recall . . . For a time, she almost . . .

He woke as light and cool as a disembodied mind, his thoughts quiet like the silver-and-black dusk of the room. *Now* he could think, maybe find a way out. Nada's competent common-sense had been right about his state of mind anyway.

But no thoughts came. Instead he found himself gazing wistfully out at the deep night of the window. A wind was making the old farmhouse snug for sleeping; he could see the dim trees ducking to it . . . If only he could step through that window, walk in the wind, and sleep among *people*. For a moment he thought he heard the dry scuff of a branch against the frame, saw it nod in the gusts.

Then he realized that sound and motion had been from Nada sitting in the shadow at the far end of the window-seat. She must have heard his own slight movement for she turned, her

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face gleaming wraith-like in the gossamer starlight, elfin and strange. He said, as he had to Elisi, but more sternly, "You shouldn't be here alone, Nada."

He seemed to see her face in the dark as if it shone with some invisible radiation to which his brain was sensitized, the face, once more, of woman enchanted into firebird. She said, quietly, "But you're not a Freeman, not even a Hierarch! And I wanted to tell you—I'm sorry I didn't understand when I saw you with Elisi. Of course, you could see it, when I came with her. But I wanted to say it too."

That episode seemed more ancient than the farm-house in the window. So much came between, and other feelings had survived the interlude so much more strongly: the sense of something generous rejected, the bright face of danger quickening his dormant life, opportunity lost. And now, impossibly, opportunity had returned. Only . . . what did you do with it? He drew it towards him cautiously, as if speech were a frail cord: "Appearances were against me. Besides, I misunderstood you too."

"I gave *you* every reason." She smiled wrily: "Even let you think I—we killed Avor! He was our chief there, you know. When he dropped dead, I had to take over, and I'm afraid I didn't do it very well. It certainly took *me* a long time and a lot of teaching to realize what *you* were!"

He smiled back: "You *did* say, once, that you knew I wouldn't scare."

"Yes, and I'd tried to bluff you; and you were the toughest person I've ever met to steer. But how you used to scare *me*! Alone with you in that skeet—that was one time I *really* felt I shouldn't be alone with you. And in that horrible City; your body walked beside me, but I could feel you were fighting monsters in a cave of bones, as if you were some warrior out of the past."

"Maybe I am; maybe that's my trouble. But you didn't think I'd hurt *you*?"

She tossed her chin: "*Certainly* not. But it was scary like—oh, like watching some dark plant grow and not knowing what strong wine or poison would spring from it."

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"And we still don't know . . . Nada. I've rid myself of the old world. But I can't belong to yours either, nor to any superbrain. I am I. And I must stand alone."

Her voice was a whisper behind the stars: "It doesn't have to be alone."

It was as if one of those stars had expanded and grown warm. Suddenly, he had shucked clean the last of the things that Ruara had stood for—the blind, insatiable craving to nuzzle and herd that smothered human wonder; he had discarded not only animal hankering, but his dour fear of it. Here was *human* comradeship. He realized, like Spring after Winter, that Nada had never been luring him to fall in with some coy, instinctual pattern; nor was she offering now to trot along behind his chariot wheels fawning for a hand-out of Love.

So now he owed it to her to make his position clear. He found himself out of bed, standing facing her, not a handsbreadth between them. The starlight shone on the clean torso he had built to fight men and storm, lean-waisted in the clasp of loose night-trousers. It shone on Nada's face turned up, as young as Elisi's would be some day, as full of wonder. But this was not the time to come still closer, with the reflex clutch of a Freeman Swees-renner. He said, gravely: "But you couldn't leave the League!"

"We could arrange something. You won't be our *enemy*!"

"No." He pondered; then, "I have a debt to the League, Nada. I'm going to make Jarel his speech to the world. Then . . . I'll know how much I still owe, and what further dealings we'll still have."

"All right," she said, "we'll mow that wheat when it's ripe." Mischief, the eternal lure of delight, not of drug, turned over in the corner of her mouth. She drifted back from him towards the door ethereally, melting into shadow except for her pale, sandaled feet and the edge of her copper sarong. He followed, drawn by a longing; but nothing that could happen in that room would have been more than salt water to his thirst, and he let the gap widen. Her hand on the latch, she whispered jubilantly, "You haven't even a *shred* of Freeman left in you, have you? Good night." And she was gone leaving marvel and eagerness behind like the scent of live flowers.

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As he turned back to his bed, he was exultantly glad that she and he could look forwards to whatever future they shaped, with that eagerness. It was more youthful than any Freeman gosling-couple could even conceive, as youthful as unbounded tomorrow.

Nada must have quietly administered him some gentle sedative with his meal; for he woke again only at high noon, ravenous. Benuha was solemnly watching him, straddling a chair in reverse, hands folded on its back, and long chin propped on his hands. Food was ready and Ben' brought it, but with a disapproving reticence.

Curiously, where he had written off the League with a proud gesture, Pahad was discomfited by Benuha's silent reproof. He tried to break the film of ice: "How's the campaign going?"

"Oh, we captured the construction crew, scale, tail, and fin. The blast-off'll follow pretty soon, I reckon, before they can rush in more . . . Look here, P'ad" (his forehead folded down the middle) "Jarel was telling me about this notion of yours—being part of a super-brain. Personally, I don't think that's any too accurate; brains and communities are a different *level* of mind, as I see it. But let's take the analogy anyway: Haven't you got all sorts of brains? Say, an orca's and a blow-fly's and —and Elisi's?" Characteristically, he wasn't legislating; he himself was disturbed by the new idea, and was worrying it out.

Pahad leaned back, his own conviction disturbed: "Yes, but how do you know what *you* are? How can you guarantee you won't end up as Freeman again?"

Ben' worried some more; then, "Well, it's a big universe, P'ad, and it looks to me as if we could have a lot of fun with it. But you can't do that single-handed, you've got to have more and more kinds of people. I sure think that's different from anything Freemen want."

That was a good argument, but Pahad was still untamed: "It is *now*. But the Missioners had much the same idea when they started."

"I reckon we'll just have to take our chances," said Ben' somberly.

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"Ben'," Pahad broke away, "when I'd skied past your outpost and was headed for the Colony, you beamed me onto it. Why?"

Benuha's face grimaced with puzzlement: "Well . . . Jarel said o-kay."

"But suppose he'd said no?"

"But that would have been just plain ridiculous. He'd sure want you to get through if that Andu character was going to make it."

"Answer my question, Ben'. If you'd gotten orders to let me wander, when you wanted to beam me, what would you have done?"

"Well . . . I guess I'd have backed my own judgment, and beamed you."

"And then what would the Tuantoi-tan, yours, have done? Broken you?"

"Oh, hardly. It'd have made a bit of an avalanche. They might have demoted me, and they'd certainly keep me off Enemy Contact afterwards. Why?"

"Oh, just that that gives me another piece to my puzzle," said Pahad bursting out of bed. "Look, Ben', get me Jarel on the communicator while I dress, will you? It's all right; Nada won't fry you for it—she's in favor. My trouble was frustration, not fatigue. And I surely will be frustrated if I don't make that speech."

CHAPTER 27

RE-JUDGMENT DAY

The tunnel through which they were shot at projectile speeds —Pahad could guess only that it must go on for hundreds of kilometers—was obviously old, leading on to the reactor-cache near the pole. But the way-station where they disembarked,

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was new. So was the stair, spiraling up through raw rock towards the flank of a mountain. There had been no time to install a screw-lift, and no need as far as Pahad was concerned. The dunt of his heels on the smooth-blasted steps, the heavy cloak flung around him, the smell of primeval cold that soaked the very core of the range, the muffled tramp of companions ahead and behind, were the stuff of the final act in Jarel's drama . . .

. . . the act that began, not: "He was this, that, or the other forerunner . . ." but: "He was in his own body . . ." The act where all the gropings of man were to be pin-pointed through a new lens. His own among them.

As he mounted, side by side with Jarel, his life-history unreeled in the back of his mind: the child carrying his tiny germ of life safe out of the living death that was a Freeman City; the passive, larval gathering of power in the long University years; the fateful bursting of his chrysalis thrusting him into the cross-winds of destiny; his first valiant, misdirected foray to Kilimanjaro; his transformation from the reflex insect to the man who shared the whole tradition of his race, as Jarel unfolded that tradition; and the final testing of muscle and mind that revealed the whole mighty curve of the past sweeping up into the future, the revised equation of human destiny.

And now—was he an oracle, an arbiter of that future? He felt rather as if he himself were consulting an oracle, to learn if his own values satisfied the equation.

Abruptly they emerged into a transparent dome, like his little observation-bubble blown large enough to accommodate a hundred observers. Divans were arranged on concentric terraces. But the audience mostly stood in quietly-talking groups or stared out into the incessant blizzard. Others trickled in silently, the supreme Tuantoi-tan of the rebels, subdued like children before some half-glorious, half-frightening spectacle. Near the front, three black-suited, captive officers of the Patrol sat on chairs, unobtrusively guarded by subalterns; they were to have every proof that the implacable sentence on their world was no bluff.

Jarel steered Pahad to an alcove where the back of the bubble

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was sealed into the rock-face. Pahad glanced about in some bewilderment: the place was furnished with the easy-chair, pansensor, and minor details from his vanished University apartment; on the pansensor sat the tiny model of a mining-rocket. Jarel smiled slily at the effect of his stage-setting. "How did we get these things? Simple! You were declared dead without claimants for heirlooms. Your effects were sent to a Redistribution Warehouse. We had an agent there." Jarel and his melodramatics! Yet—it *was* dramatic to sit in the chair where he had day-dreamed and take part in the most decisive act in history.

Jarel had already strode down to the front of the little auditorium and halted under a great screen that tilted towards the audience, silver-blank. Beside him stood a tall, upright shaft of crystal crossed near its top by six dazzling hair-lines of ruby light towards which an emerald arrow was climbing. He tossed back his cloak and stood in his customary crimson, the silver insignia frosty on his breast, a swarthy, panther-bearded showman of Olympus. He paused a moment in grave silence, acknowledging the awe of the spectacle where destiny had cast him as master of ceremonies—the giant knife-edge that splits the path ahead for the human race on Earth and beyond. He threw a switch.

At that instant, Pahad knew, the stark picture of reality broke on countless pansensor screens—thousands in Toangahela, millions in the million Assemblies of City-Blocks Freeman and Tuantoi pylons. Everywhere the sacred daily cycle, unaltered for a hundred generations, had been broken so that the Race could seek a delusion of strength and defiance in its mass-mind. On those screens glimmered the curve of the dome marbled by lashing streamers of snow over its exterior, the chiefs of the Rebels, the tilting, waiting screen-within-the screens, Jarel. And Jarel began to speak with words like blades to shatter the ameboid Assembly-minds into their half-human, and latent-human, members.

As the emerald arrow pierced each ruddy line on the upright beside him, he stated, it would signal the detonation of a fissionable mass, a blast that would hurl a mountain of ice and

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rock into outer space and kick the globe to roll irrevocably upright, not in centuries now, but in decades. Six blasts, because to deliver the whole thrust at once would have loosed earthquakes and tidal waves. In words keyed to minds fed on antique, imbecile fiction, he drove home his points. Mercilessly he foretold the coming dissolution of the polar cap to flood lowlands into shallow seas, while the dead continent emerged and gave root to new life. Sternly he warned of the need for obedience by all who did not wish to perish in the cataclysm their own leaders' frenzy had forced. Grimly he proclaimed that only those who could change with the changing Earth might henceforth send posterity into its future . . .

Over his head, the screen swam with a ghostly motion that congealed into the picture of a dreadful plain stark under raging snow, the lowest pit of a frozen hell. Even the half-comprehending creatures in the million Assembly-halls comprehended that this was the under-pivot of Earth . . .

The arrow seemed to be touching the lowest ruby thread. The World Community and League—became a single pulse, slowing, poising . . . if the whole titanic venture should misfire, the arrow-point appear beyond the line in silence? . . . the League would shed its prestige indeed!

Pahad could hear the blood singing thin in his eardrums . . .

On the screen, mirrored in the million screens, the event was too sudden to grasp. The field blazed into a slanting cliff of incandescence, blindingly beyond any color, stunning vision even at third-hand relay. Only after-sight could reconstruct the picture of a jagged mass, like a City-site torn from its roots and hurled, at more than escape-velocity, out of the world into the void; its asteroid hugeness was scaled by an abandoned Patroller work-hall bounding end-over-end, like a broken pencil-lead at the root of the flame-cliff, crumpling and puffing out in a tiny flash. No sound, because no microphone could have translated the all-but-solid concussion. And, with the instantaneous vision, the picture writhed and foundered as the cameras at the spot fused. In the observation-bubble, the Tuantoi-tan of Toangahela waited, not breathing . . .

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Underfoot, the mountain heaved as if a wave of iron had raced beneath it . . . time hung . . . and a sound like bursting eardrums visibly distorted the bubble for a moment. Outside, the tempest seemed to falter. And Pahad at last drew a deep breath.

The first hair-line had vanished, and the arrow slid relentlessly towards the second. The blind screen added to the timeless awe of the interval . . .

The keen point pierced. The second line blinked out. The intolerable moments counted themselves stolidly till the shockwave heaved under the dome. The impact of sound twitched the reflections on the dome's surface . . .

At the third concussion, Pahad's numbed mind, groping for anything to make the event real, took note that the blizzard itself seemed to be failing. The snow no longer boiled into the light of the dome like an onset of demons over their own dead; it swirled, hesitated, and at moments even drew back . . .

After the fourth blast, he saw that this was really so. Though the blast-craters were no more than pores in the surface of Earth, their walls had vaporized like sheets of polar photosphere, and a hellish updraft from them halted and sucked back even the polar maelstrom. To right and left of the bubble, through the thinning, sullen snowfall, loomed up an amphitheatre of nameless mountains, blacker in the blackness, gazing towards the pole . . .

The fifth blast was visible to the naked eye like summer lightning polewards through the dwindling snow; the sound came raw, unmuffled. Wracks of cumulus drove at such nightmare speed that the stars seemed to rush backwards between them. And by the icy light of those stars, Pahad saw what no human eyes had ever seen before—and all the eyes of Earth were seeing with him now: the central plateau of Antarctica naked, a planet-curve of whiteness dead as salt to the horizon.

Time resumed its flow for his inner self as his mind grappled with that soecracle. Even hope froze as a flower would be frozen in liquid air. *This* the cradle of a great and shining race? Or a charnel-house to swallow the bones of millennia and show no trace?

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He fought the mood. He must not judge with a stupefied mind. Even the elite of the Rebel Hierarchy sat wan, dumbed by this spectacle their own will had launched, and by the battle of titans with a changing Earth that lay ahead. Yet, inevitably, he did judge. And he saw the Rebels and their dreams as a fleeting spark in a lifeless universe that would soon enough reclaim this continent now wrested from it—and all Earth. The giant blasts, man's mightiest blow against chaos, had been a momentary flicker; the hundred-million ton crags hurled into the abyss south of Earth, were dust in an ocean; the craters would quickly become little frozen tarns invisible from Mars with the best instruments. They might thaw for a trivial human age, but the ice would return in its own time as the sun itself grew old. Was this effort, then, really better in the end than Freeman insect-bliss and apathy?

Something jabbing his hand forced a current of pain-impulses through the tides of emotion that swayed his brain. He looked down to focus on the cause, unclench his fingers and identify what he saw: a little, carved sarong-brooch, a naked Polynesian girl diving through delicate strands of water-weed. The joy and grace-of-life in it pierced the desolation of his universe; its warmth spread against the devouring rot of resignation, and restored the sane fabric of valor. Whence had it come?

Memory drew the answer from his semi-conscious: He had seen that brooch clasping Nada's bronze-red sarong, seen it just now, without seeing it in the maelstrom of huge events, lying on the side-table by his chair; but his hand, wiser for once than his mind, had sought it out.

The girl's body was exquisitely like Nada's own—the total femininity that once ran towards him in an unshuttered communicator-screen. Nada was quite saucy enough, he knew, to intend that reminder. But that was not the feverish pawing of a she-Freeman. "If the end *is* night," the lithe body said, "is it nothing to have lived? And is it not more to live as a human mind open to the kingdom, and the power, and the glory than as an insect trapped in an endless instinct-cycle?"

With a sudden knocking of his heart, his eyes sought and found Nada. She was across the little amphitheatre, kneeling as

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she had knelt on his window-seat, like a good child, hands clasped in lap. She was not looking towards him, but southwards. Yet she revealed his world as if a window, grimed by Freeman squalor, had suddenly been raised to greet April walking through the young grass towards May.

The fragments of his puzzle slipped into place; the keystone locked into the arch of his convictions. Here at last were men and women who worked together, not by the compulsions of blind nature, nor the playground supervision of fumbling government, but by human intelligence. Why, they had shut him out and threatened himself, till he had first defied them and then chosen them in the face of all instinct and swarm-wisdom. Nada herself had come to him not as to the eternal Male but as to a human being.

A concerted breath drawn by the assembly brought his mind back into his eyes. On the farthest horizon, and yet frighteningly close, like a solar eruption brought within touch, the last explosion bloomed, lifted and lanced the bare sky. Hundreds of kilometers away though it was, the black hunk blasted from Earth was visible silhouetted against a bolt of light that hurt the back of the eyes. The flare curved and dwindled in perspective and went out, leaving prismatic colors to dance in after-image. But the mind held also an instantaneous vision of golden crags and plain dimming through brief rose, and tiered faces like archangels . . . Nada's face . . .

Between the flame and the thunderclap racing towards them, his mind flamed and raced. He saw the spirit of man and his own place in it: not a flicker on the scales of space and time, a blind licking for a crumb of synthetic sweet, a repeating decimal; but a vista of universes each mightier and more eternal than the dust-eddy of a galaxy.

Nearer to him, he saw leagued man plant his feet on the reclaimed continent, round over the skeleton rocks with virgin life, clothe the hills with forests of unborn legend, trace roads across elf-realms to sagas yet unguessed, pile strongholds of defiance and aspiration beside mirroring lakes.

Closest of all: In such a world, he, Pahad Konor the lone wolf

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who grew restive even in Toangahela, could go out for distant flights and single combat. In such a world he could see love not as a shameful prison but as a ship that was one with all the winds and tides and carried him beyond the edge of the world. Now, soon, would be the time when he could hold Nada, the real Nada of lips and hands, close to him in exultation.

And the children of their love would move proudly into the new world with the delicate eagerness of Elisi, the wide-flung romance of Jarel, the plain manliness of Benuha, the strong poetry of Holvor, the bluff valor of Avor who had died facing the enemy, the company of a sea-folk more genial than in ancient myth, above all with the womanly wisdom of Nada who was a human being before she was a woman, even with—wasn't it fair to say?—his own questing drive that climbed the ruins of its blunders and went on.

The last hammer-blow of destiny jarring the dome, brought him to his feet.

Jarel's live, challenging face gestured him to the microphone.

Now, *now* to claim the future that had been restored to man, to call all those who had endured like his father, mummy wheat awaiting the rains. Now to rally the human remnant from the paradise of the swarm, the eternal, perfect, hideous today, into the boundless unknown of tomorrow.

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